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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 27 August 2012

Lundi 27 août 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 27 August 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 27 août 2012

The House met at 1030.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let us pray.

Prayers.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR VAUGHAN

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Good morning, and welcome back.

I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Greg Sorbara as the member for the electoral district of Vaughan, effective the first day of August, 2012. Accordingly, the Speaker has issued his warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I beg to inform the House that His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in his office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 / Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. Je tiens à souhaiter la bienvenue à M. Carol Jolin, qui est nouvellement nommé président de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, et M. Pierre Léonard, récemment nommé directeur général de l'AEFO. Ils sont accompagnés par M. Stewart Kiff. Alors, merci d'être ici aujourd'hui pour cet important événement.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to welcome my constituency assistant, Sue Christensen, who's down for the day here today. She works very hard for the people of Barrie, and I'm happy to have her.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Brayden Darroch. He's going into grade 5 and hopefully will be attending class on September 4. He's here today to watch the happenings of Queen's Park. He's just coming into

the gallery there now. I'd like to welcome him for the first time to Queen's Park.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It gives pleasure to introduce Sam Hammond, head of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario; Fred Hahn, head of CUPE Ontario; and Ken Coran, head of OSSTF.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Introductions? There being no more introductions, it's time for oral questions.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Kim Craiton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. I did want to introduce a special guest from my riding. His name is Craig Brockwell, and he's with the Ontario Teachers' Federation. Craig, welcome. It's a pleasure to have you here, buddy. Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Before I address my question to the Premier, I want to take a moment to congratulate and thank our finance critic, Peter Shurman, of the Ontario PC caucus, for finally breaking through to the Liberal government that a legislated pay freeze is essential to getting our books back into balance.

Premier, we find ourselves in the Legislature with two additional weeks of the fall sitting, quite frankly because of the mess you've made in the public school system. You have failed to negotiate a deal. In fact, you started negotiating back in the spring. Only four out of 72 boards have agreements; that's about 4%. So, Premier, you've created a mess, but I want parents and students to understand that the Ontario PC caucus is going to bail you out. We want them back in school the very first day of school; they shouldn't pay the price.

My question for the Premier is, surely to goodness we're not going to have to go through this 3,999 more times. Will you support an across-the-board legislated pay freeze for all of us in the broader public sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's good to be back, Speaker. It's good to be back. There's a strange mixture of both support and criticism bound up in that question. Of course I welcome the support, and I see the criticism a little bit differently. But I think, in all seriousness, Speaker, there is an important matter before all of us. This afternoon we will be introducing a bill, a piece of legis-

lation, that will help us move forward both in terms of maintaining progress and stability in our schools and helping us achieve some of the goals we have set out for ourselves in our fiscal plan.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank the Progressive Conservative caucus for the support that they are showing as we move forward on this. I understand that they raised some initial concerns that we've tried to address, and we look forward to moving forward together on this particular matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let me say back to the Premier: I know you had committed to getting a deal with the unions back in the spring. You failed to do so. You needed our support to bail you out of a mess. But, Premier, if we do have you finally understanding the gravity of the situation, the conversation you and I had back in November in your office, where I said that we needed a mandatory across-the-board pay freeze and we needed it immediately—if you're willing now to move on a partial wage freeze for teachers, surely there is a better way, one laid out by the Ontario PC caucus, that says we have 4,000 collective agreements in the province. This is but one; there are 3,999 more to go. Why don't we just cut to the chase? Will you support the PC call for an across-the-board wage freeze for all of us—teachers, doctors, firefighters, MPPs—that will save us \$2 billion a year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No, we won't do that, because it won't work; it's as simple as that. It's not constitutional. We've been given some pretty clear direction from the Supreme Court of Canada when it comes to these matters.

Speaker, I'll tell you why our bill strikes the appropriate balance. From a labour perspective—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. I believe you asked a question and would like to have the answer, so it would be nice if we had a little bit of quiet while the answer is given.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleagues in both parties I know will be interested in understanding that the bill that we are going to introduce, which has been the subject of unprecedented scrutiny and publicity relative to the bills that we've introduced in this House in the past, Speaker, is in fact based on a memorandum of understanding that we've entered into with a number of federations. Building on that road map, it has already received the support of over 55,000 teachers and four school boards representing over 160,000 students, so I'd like to say that we're doing what we need to do both from a fiscal and a collective bargaining point of view.

1040

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's hard to follow the Premier's arguments. On one hand, he says some things are

constitutional, then he finds that they're not constitutional. He echoes arguments made by the union bosses that he says he's going to actually fight in court. I had hoped that the Premier had finally come aboard the Conservative boat, to understand that a mandatory public sector wage freeze for all of us, across the board, is fair, is reasonable. After two years and several months of negotiations, you've only brought half a deal forward.

Premier, are you fully on the boat or not? Are you going to jump back into the lake? Clearly, the way to proceed is an across-the-board wage freeze for all of us in the broader public sector. It will save us \$2 billion. It will help, then, to reduce the size and cost of government.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, I think we've said it. My honourable colleague has made this request of us on several occasions, and we've offered the same response in equal number. I don't intend to revisit that.

I think what's important as we speak to what is before this House—not yet by way of introduction of bills but by way of subject matter. I think we all have a shared interest in ensuring that we maintain the stability and progress that we have made in our schools. We all have an interest in ensuring that we achieve our fiscal goals. When it comes to that progress and stability, it is nothing short of amazing, Speaker. We have smaller classes. We're rolling out full-day kindergarten. We've built some 570 new schools. There are some 27,000 school renewal projects that we have completed. The results that we have for that: higher test scores, higher grad rates, peace and stability, certainty that parents have to be able to count on.

I think we've come a long way, and this bill embodies the very sentiment that informed our progress, and we look forward to keeping moving forward.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I had hoped for better. I had hoped that the conversation I had with the Premier, a private conversation back in November, had finally sunk in, that you would understand the importance of an across-the-board wage freeze that gives you time to reduce the total size and cost of government.

So let me help, if I understand the Premier's position. He wants a partial wage freeze on some teachers, but he doesn't want it elsewhere. Specifically, since the spring, the government has signed a three-year deal with 6,000 CUPE members at Ontario Power Generation, OPG, that will see an annual wage increase of 2.7% a year, so almost a 3% pay increase.

Premier, why are you giving some workers, power workers, almost a 3% pay raise for three years, but you're freezing teachers? How do you distinguish between teachers and others? Isn't it better to be fair, reasonable and across the board?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me remind my honourable colleagues about how we got to this point with

respect to teachers. I know my colleague the leader of the NDP would want to pay attention to this as well.

We started some six months ago, understanding very well that there's a clock that's going to turn over at midnight on the 31st of August which will result in teachers getting an increase in pay. That's something that we can't afford to do at this point in time. It's not in keeping with our fiscal plan.

We awarded pay hikes to teachers during the course of the past nine years because those were suited to the times. They were responsible; they were reasonable. But these are different times, Speaker. There's a lot of uncertainty in the global economy that's affecting our rate of growth here in Ontario.

Our bill is designed to hit the pause button when it comes to teacher pay but at the same time continue to increase in smaller classes, continue to invest in the roll-out of full-day kindergarten, continue to make progress on test scores and graduation rates.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier seems to be talking out of both sides of his mouth here. I thought he was moving beyond that and had come aboard the PC position of an across-the-board wage freeze.

I'll ask the Premier again because I don't think I got an answer there. How do you distinguish between CUPE power workers and a partial freeze for teachers? On one hand, you say we need to freeze wages so we can get about reducing the size and cost of government, but when it comes to Ontario Power Generation, you're going to give the workers almost a 3% raise each and every year for three years. Premier, how do you distinguish between freezing teachers' salaries partially, but you're not going to do it for hydro workers, MPAC officers or anybody else? Help me understand your rationale. It kind of looks like you're panicking.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I know that my honourable colleague knows that that agreement was signed before the budget was introduced. What we're going to do now, of course, is deal with agreements going forward, and that's what this bill is all about.

From a student perspective, this bill hits the nail right on the head. It's going to continue to invest in the classroom; it's going to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten until finally it's available in all our schools, available to some 250,000 three-, four- and five-year-olds; it continues to invest in smaller classes; it continues to maintain our progress in test scores and graduation rates.

I know my honourable colleague has a real interest in a strong economy. The fact is that the foundation of our strength in the Ontario economy happens to be in our people. So in our schools we're doing a lot more than just imparting knowledge; we're building the strongest possible workforce. That is good for all of us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, in this scramble around the teacher deal, you've forgotten what you used to say. In fact it was in the spring of 2010—Premier, I'll remind you of the 2010 budget, where you said you would have a pay freeze across the board. You failed to do so. The CUPE agreement for power workers is only one part of the deal.

Secondly, Premier, interestingly, in that 2010 budget you also exempted senior bureaucrats from the pay freeze. You said then that they would get merit pay increases. This was a loophole you put in schedule 24 of your bill. That has resulted in 98% of bureaucrats getting bonus pay—98%. You wonder what the 2% did wrong not to get Dalton McGuinty's handouts. Surely, Premier, by giving that exemption to senior public sector workers, you've undermined your credibility in negotiating across-the-board wage freezes. Our freeze includes that—everybody, across the board. It's fair; it's equal. Will you finally agree to fully come on board the Conservative boat and go about reducing the size and cost of government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I remind my honourable colleague and his party that they were the authors of that pay-for-performance system that we have in place. They initiated that. It was a result of a consultation that they had done for themselves. They put it in place. What we have done is, we have acknowledged that the system they put in place is unsatisfactory. So I've asked the Minister of Finance to take a look at that and to report back to us with what we might do to ensure that we're being more fair both to the people who work within the public service and to taxpayers generally.

But again, Speaker, I want to acknowledge the support that we're receiving from the Progressive Conservatives when it comes to the bill we intend to introduce shortly, which will ensure both that we achieve our fiscal targets and maintain stability and progress in our schools.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Just a couple of short weeks ago, the Premier joined with New Democrats to defeat a bill that did pretty much the same thing as the bill that they're going to be introducing this afternoon. Back then, they called it reckless; they called it unconstitutional; they called it simplistic; they called it illegal. My question is a pretty simple one: Can the Premier pinpoint the moment that he decided he was okay with being reckless and simplistic and unconstitutional?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question from my honourable colleague, the leader of the NDP. I would ask her to pay close attention to the facts connected with the evolution of the bill and a memorandum of understanding. We sat down with the federations. Those who chose to stay—we worked long and hard with them. We devoted more than 300 hours of bargaining and negotiation and we landed on a memorandum of understanding. That has been adopted, largely, by 55,000

teachers. My honourable colleague says that the labour community opposes this. Well, the fact of the matter is that 55,000 have said, "No, we support both the process and the result."

So, Speaker, we intend to move forward with this legislation. I ask my honourable colleague that she take the time to reflect upon the process that led to where we find ourselves today and that she consider seriously supporting the bill so that together we can send the right message to teachers, students and parents alike.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm merely saying what the Premier himself has been saying for years and what his own MPPs were saying just a few short weeks ago. Does the Premier have any evidence at all that he can produce in this House that this bill will do anything other than create expensive court challenges and turmoil in Ontario's classrooms?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, a few things: First of all, I would ask my honourable colleague to acknowledge what it is that we've been able to achieve by working so hard and well together in our publicly funded education system during the course of the past nine years.

To give credit where credit is due, Speaker, while we in government have the privilege of developing policies, appropriating funds and ensuring that the appropriate funding mechanisms are in place, ultimately it's teachers inside the classroom who deliver, and they keep delivering, the best-quality education in the English-speaking world. We didn't do that; our teachers did that. It's that same intent that informs this bill. We want to keep working with Ontario teachers, but we need to do so in a new fiscal context, one that says that we can't afford to give teachers their pay hike right now, not at this point in time. But we can continue to invest in full-day kindergarten, smaller classes and more academic progress inside every one of our schools.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the people who sent us here expect us to work hard on the challenges that they are facing. Instead, once again we see a Premier mostly focused on himself. The desperate drive for a majority government cost us \$190 million in Mississauga and who knows how much in Oakville. Now, after cynically forcing a by-election, the Premier thinks that he has found the path back to absolute power in this province, and he'll be campaigning on it, as a matter of fact, later on today. Can the Premier tell us how much kids in the classroom and families across Ontario are going to have to pay this time for his reckless quest for power?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't believe we can afford at this point in time to give teachers a pay hike. My honourable colleague sees things differently. She thinks we can afford to give teachers a pay hike right now. I say we can't. I think it's black and white: She wants to give teachers more pay; we're saying that we

can't afford to do so at the present time. We can't afford to give teachers more pay and roll out full-day kindergarten; more pay and maintain smaller class sizes; more pay and maintain progress when it comes to test scores and graduation rates. It's a time for us to make choices. Government calls for us to be responsible in that matter. We're making a responsible, balanced, thoughtful choice. And so far, we've secured the support of 55,000 Ontario teachers.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I want to ask the Premier about the government's priorities in this session. The Premier is showing today that he's happy to recall the Legislature when it comes to saving his job, but 600,000 people in this province without work are wondering when they're going to be able to be a priority for a change. We've put forward positive plans on this side of the bench, like our jobs creation tax credit that gives a hand to companies that are actually creating jobs in this province.

The Premier has made it pretty clear that his job is an urgent priority. When will the 600,000 people looking for work get the same kind of attention?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm delighted to speak to the issue of employment, and that brings us back to the matter of our bill. My honourable colleague knows that some of the advice that we received along the way was that we jettison some 20,000 people who earn a living in our schools: 10,000 teachers and 10,000 education support workers. We're not prepared to do that. Our choice instead is to hit the pause button when it comes to pay and use what little money we have available to roll out full-day kindergarten, to maintain class sizes at a smaller size and to continue to make progress in test scores and graduation rates. That's 20,000 jobs that are tied up in this bill that are a result of hitting the pause button on pay.

The other thing I'd ask my honourable colleague to keep in mind is that, were we to adopt the advice given to us by others in other quarters, those 20,000 who would lose their jobs would be the 20,000 youngest workers, those ones who are just starting up their families, those who are just dealing with mortgage payments. We choose not to fire those people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier was truly interested in taking a balanced approach to balancing the books, he could look at the bonuses that his government hands out to the top earners in the public sector. Can the Premier explain why that wasn't a priority for him? Is it simply because that's not an issue that he can exploit in the by-elections?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would ask my honourable colleague to remember that when we had our discussions about the budget, that was not an issue that she raised with us. It was never raised by my honourable colleague.

The pay-for-performance system was not raised by my honourable colleague.

Having said that, I think she has a genuine concern that we share. That's why I've asked the Minister of Finance to take a look at our pay-for-performance system. As I said before publicly, if everybody's getting it, it's not pay-for-performance, it's just pay, so we've got to necessarily make some changes to that. If my honourable colleague has any specific advice in that regard, we would welcome it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier wants an urgent priority, maybe he should look at the fact that there are thousands and thousands of families in this province waiting for a family doctor. In Kitchener–Waterloo, where the Premier is going to be campaigning later on today, 20,000 families are waiting for a family doctor.

The Premier is ready to cut his summer short in a desperate bid to win these by-elections and get his majority government back. When are families who are waiting for a doctor or home care going to get the same kind of attention?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm proud to report that since we first earned the privilege of serving Ontarians in government, there are 164 more doctors practising in the Kitchener–Waterloo region.

There's always more work that we can and should do, but the fact of the matter is we have rolled out family health teams. We have nurse practitioner clinics. We have built new hospitals. Our wait times have come down. I think there are over 12,000 more nurses now working in Ontario.

All of that represents progress, but I am, of course, prepared to acknowledge that there is still more work to be done.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, the Ontario PC Party has been clear on the need for a mandatory public sector wage freeze for more than a year now to stop you from overseeing the hemorrhaging of taxpayer money as we head towards the government's looming \$411-billion deficit. I myself made this recommendation directly to you on several occasions, beginning last November in your office. So you knew where we stood and you knew what you had to do, but you just made excuses, sir.

We have since learned that your mismanagement of public money goes beyond what anyone ever imagined, with 98% of public sector managers receiving bonuses. Now you're scrambling, recalling the Legislature to try to implement what should have been in place a long time ago.

Minister, are you finally ready to admit that we were right all along, and will you now implement a wage freeze for the entire public sector for two years? Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Could everyone sit, please?

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Speaker, in fact, this government began last December speaking actively, recognizing section 2(d) of the Constitution, laying out a path to be able to achieve this. On the one hand, as we maintain the important investments we've made in our classrooms—full-day learning, smaller class sizes—we've been able to achieve an agreement with 55,000 teachers. As the Premier has indicated, we are pushing the pause button, not just for teachers but for others, as collective agreements come due.

With respect to pay-for-performance, we agree that the system that that member's government set up is not working. It's broken, and we will fix it. I look forward to their support as we do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Really, the minister seems to have forgotten the Public Sector Compensation Restraint Act, 2010. Your government is just as unwilling to learn from its mistakes as it is unwilling to take responsibility for them. You have been negligent with taxpayers' money. You are clearly ready to continue that negligence: 190 million taxpayer dollars to cover your political hide to cancel a Mississauga power station; \$35 million in bonuses to government employees when most Ontarian haven't even seen a 1% increase in their wages—not to mention Ornge, not to mention eHealth, which you continue to refuse to accept responsibility for—and colleges are preparing to strike. Now you won't work with our party to implement a wage freeze for all government workers.

Ontario PCs will do what is needed to make sure that Ontario kids go back to school in September. Why isn't your government doing what is needed to make sure that Ontario recovers? Why do you insist on backing down from a government-wide wage freeze when you know it's exactly what is required?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, the average rate of settlement over the last two years has been lower in the Ontario public service than it has been in the broader public sector as well as the federal government and the private sector, which helped us achieve the objectives we set forth in 2010.

1100

It's important, Mr. Speaker, to move forward, to push the pause button—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member from Pembroke—if you're going to heckle, I'd ask you to sit in your own seat.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It is important to protect the gains we have made in the classroom: smaller class sizes, full-day learning. That's why we're pushing the pause

button, and we welcome the support of the official opposition.

We have others to deal with as time goes forward, Mr. Speaker. We intend to do that, because it is about classrooms, it's about kids and about getting back to balance in a responsible way that protects the interests of all Ontarians.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Premier: The government has had eight months to negotiate, to engage in collective bargaining, with teachers and education workers. But instead of working to find real solutions, the Premier would rather create a crisis to win by-elections. Why is the Premier playing politics instead of looking after the interests of students?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As the member opposite knows, teacher and support staff contracts are set to expire on August 31. We began our dialogue with our partners in education right across the province in February. We worked long and hard and we had tough conversations with our partners as we asked them to work with us, to put a pause on teacher pay increases, to move away from a system where sick days could be cashed out at retirement; rather, to move to a more modern sick leave plan, so that young teachers could have maternity benefits and we could live within our fiscal realities, so we could roll out full-day kindergarten and we could keep our class sizes small.

Speaker, we reached agreement with 55,000 teachers—those teachers who worked with us. It was an incredible challenge to work with those who walked away after less than an hour, but we have moved forward. We have a road map, and it is that road map that we seek to put in place right across the province so that school starts on time and so that it will continue and so that the dollars will remain in our classrooms.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Teachers and education workers have said that they will be in the classroom in September. Teachers and education workers have said that they would accept a wage freeze. Will the Premier admit that the reason we're here today has everything to do with seats in the Legislature as opposed to kids in the classroom?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Speaker, the contents of the legislation require a 0% salary increase for the next two years. All teachers will take a 1.5% pay cut in the form of three unpaid professional development days so that younger teachers can continue to move through the grid, and we will amend the grid over the long term with a view to sustainability. By removing the banked sick days we'll eliminate a \$1.7-billion liability from our boards.

It is not accurate to say that those whom we have not reached agreement with have agreed to a pay freeze,

Speaker. They have not. They have advanced a proposition where they would see a pay freeze for two years and increases for the following two years. They did not come forward with solutions that met our fiscal parameters, but there is still time to do so. We encourage OSSTF, we encourage ETFO, we encourage CUPE to have conversations with us. We have drafted a bill that would allow conversations to take place on provincial issues between now and August 31, and local issues between now and December 31. There is still time for everyone to put our students first.

TEACHERS

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, as we speak, teachers across the province are busy getting ready for the start of the new school year. For any teacher, especially for new teachers with little seniority, labour talks can be a stressful time. As caring educators, they just want to get back to the classroom, giving the students their best and helping to increase student achievement and well-being. But we know that there are many current practices in place that work against younger teachers. We know that new teachers face challenges when they start trying to gain exposure and experience in their chosen fields.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister update this House on what the government is doing to support younger teachers and increase opportunities for them?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for giving me the opportunity to speak about how much this government values our young teachers and the work that they do. Young teachers are the fuel that keeps the engines of our education system running—constantly learning, adapting and improving every step. The McGuinty government's support for Ontario's young teachers has been shown in our labour discussions, the OECTA MOU and the proposed Putting Students First Act.

That's why we're committed to fair hiring practices in the education sector. We need to see fair hiring practices that are transparent, that are accountable to young teachers, so that everyone knows and understands the rules about being hired. It's particularly necessary in a system where accountability for public dollars is critical.

I want to be clear, though: It will be management that will still make the ultimate decision about who to hire, but that role comes with a responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood by all those young teachers who want nothing more than to get in front of a classroom in Ontario and teach our kids.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: My next question is also for the Minister of Education. Minister, everyone knows a qualified and keen young teacher who is eager to gain work experience, and I know my constituents in Scarborough—Agincourt will be pleased to hear that the government is committed to a level playing field for teacher hiring.

As a former school trustee, I have a unique perspective on just how valuable all our teachers are and also the energy that young teachers bring to our schools. Minister, what else is the government doing to support these new educators?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I, too, am very pleased to know that we will be taking steps to ensure fair and transparent hiring practices, and we will be introducing a regulation in the coming weeks.

But in addition, Speaker, we heard loud and clear how important it was for young teachers to be recognized for their qualifications and for their experience. In the agreement that we reached with OECTA and subsequently with AEFO, the experience of younger teachers will be recognized through partial movement through the grid in the coming years, and the costs will be offset by all teachers taking a 1.5% pay cut in the form of three unpaid professional days.

We're also putting in place new short-term sick leave benefits that support young teachers in cases of serious illness, and we're putting in place proper maternity benefits so that young teachers can have the supports that they need to be in the classroom every single day teaching our kids and know that we value the efforts and the role that they play in making sure our education system is one of the best in the world.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean—Carleton.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. Welcome back.

My question is to the Minister of Education. It's clear that after nine years of mismanagement by this Liberal government you've put the province on a downward spiral. As a result, we're now facing record deficits and ever-increasing debts. This threatens the long-term viability of public education. Your own economic adviser Don Drummond stated that we would have a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt if we didn't do something quickly. This means that every single dollar spent on servicing the debt and the deficit is one less dollar for kids in the classroom.

Will your government finally admit that Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus were right in calling for a legislated public sector wage freeze and that we're here at the 11th hour bailing your government out so kids can be in the classroom come September 1? We can stop wage increases that we cannot afford.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to acknowledge the support that we have received and the indication of support that we have received from the PCs in their desire to put students first. But I would say that we are not prepared to take a lot of lessons on how to rebuild and strengthen public education from them.

We're proud of the investments that we've made in education since we've been here for nine years. We've got our class sizes down. We've got our test scores up. We've got our graduation rates up, and we are being

studied from around the world as having an education system that speaks to the needs of all of our children, ensuring that they succeed regardless of their socio-economic demographic or their first language.

We've seen eight years of peace and stability in our schools, and we've worked with our partners in education to rebuild that system. What we are asking now is for more partnership, to take a pause when it comes to teacher pay increases so that we can continue to roll out full-day kindergarten, which the opposition would slash, and so that we can keep our class sizes down and we can keep that success rate of our students up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I hate to say this, but we told you so. We've said for a year that a broader public sector wage freeze was the only way to go. It was the fair way to go, the equitable way to go, and it was the way to go to get Ontario back on track so our public services wouldn't collapse under that debt and that deficit.

You've got to realize that your plan over the last nine years has put Ontario students at risk of not starting school in September. You signed rich, handsome agreements that we couldn't afford, that account for 5.5% salary increases on September 1, if not dealt with responsibly.

Will you admit that the PC plan on wage freezes was right all along, that your economic mismanagement has caused a crisis in education, and will you finally admit that you need Tim Hudak to bail your government out?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Can I have everyone sit?

Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important, as we have the debate in this Legislature, to recognize this is not about us, this is not about them. This is about the students in our classrooms and making sure we give them what they need.

The opposition would choose to cancel full-day kindergarten. There are no parents that I've talked to, in the many conversations that I've had, who would choose a teacher pay increase over full-day kindergarten. We need to roll out full-day kindergarten.

I know that they would choose to fire 20,000—10,000 teachers and 10,000 support workers—and let our class sizes go up. That is not the choice that we are making. We need their support to see this legislation pass, and I hope that every single member in this Legislature who has the privilege to sit here will stop thinking about them or us and think about the students they are privileged to represent.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. New question.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Speaker, 560

good-paying jobs will be lost in already hard-hit communities when this government closes the racetracks at Fort Erie, Sarnia and Windsor, and thousands more jobs will be lost as the slots-at-racetracks program is eliminated province-wide.

Late last week, your government received a report from your transition panel which concluded that the \$50-million government-proposed support industry transition fund is totally insufficient to build a bridge to sustainability.

Minister, when is this government going to finally start treating the men and women in the horse racing industry with the respect they deserve and put together a transition plan that will allow for real sustainability?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the honourable member opposite for his question, Mr. Speaker. I did indeed receive last week the interim report from the expert panel of three former cabinet ministers of all persuasions. It was a good report. It was an excellent report.

The panel concluded that the government in fact made the right decision with respect to ending the slots-at-racetracks program, a program that cost taxpayers some \$345 million a year. The panel went on to say that it would in fact be a mistake to reinstate the program, going so far as to refer to it as "poor public policy."

The panel also advised that a viable horse racing industry requires ongoing funding to maintain attractive purses, sustain tracks, support breeding and grow a robust system. I've asked the panel members to try to work with the industry to see if they can come up with one.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Here's what the panel said: Without long-term financial assistance to the industry and given the withdrawal of over \$1 billion in slots-at-racetracks program funds over the same three-year period, the panel cannot deliver a model for sustainability or gradual exit for those invested or employed in the industry. When will this government finally table a transition plan that will save the thousands of jobs and horses that its reckless elimination of the slots program has put in danger?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I've asked the panel to continue to consult with the industry. Industry response to the panel has actually been quite positive. Here's what OHRIA, the Ontario Horse Racing Industry Association, said:

"The OHRIA board has reviewed the OMAFRA panel's report and OHRIA is appreciative of the effort of the OMAFRA panel for providing a report which has provided a path forward...."

They go on to highlight a number of positive comments in the report:

"The horse racing and breeding industry is worth saving," they said, as did the panel.

"The horse racing and breeding industry is a valuable contributor to Ontario's economy...."

"The horse racing and breeding industry is worthy of government investment.

"The horse racing and breeding industry is a valuable social, cultural and community asset."

I appreciate OHRIA's comments, I appreciate the work of the expert panel and I look forward to their continuing to work with the industry and bringing in a report.

YOUTH SERVICES

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Mr. Speaker, I know that we've made significant progress when it comes to crime in this province. The overall youth crime rate in Ontario is 23% lower than it was in 2000. The youth violent crime rate is also down by 17% over the same period—better than the national rate.

However, many youth continue to face significant challenges and multiple barriers to success. The recent high-profile shootings in Toronto show that there's a lot more work to be done. Following tragic incidents in Toronto this summer, the Premier asked the Ministers of Children and Youth Services and Community Safety and Correctional Services to consult with stakeholders to develop a balanced action plan that focuses on ensuring that young people have the support they need to make positive choices.

Speaker, I ask, what action is being taken as a result of this plan?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to thank the member from Don Valley East for this question, but also for his leadership and, frankly, the leadership of the member to my right, the member from Scarborough—Guildwood, and many others in this government on this important issue.

I want to say that I'm very pleased that we are taking immediate action, with the Roots of Youth Violence report as the foundation for our action moving forward. As part of our youth action plan, we're expanding the summer jobs programs for disadvantaged youth to provide part-time jobs throughout the school year. We are also working with the private sector to create more employment opportunities for young people. We are also increasing the number of youth outreach workers, these very important individuals who work deep in the communities, supporting vulnerable youth. We're increasing them by more than 50% right across the province, and we'll be supporting communities' programs through a new annualized youth opportunities fund.

I'm also pleased to announce that Alvin Curling, a former Speaker of this Legislature, has been appointed as my strategic adviser to help guide the implementation of our youth action plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Coteau: My next question is also to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. You've been very busy over the last 30 days, meeting with young

people and their families; community organizations that serve and support youth; representatives of social services, education, justice and business; and members of the public. It's apparent that your hard work has paid off by bringing forward a youth action plan that will benefit an additional 13,000 young people by implementing over 20 initiatives.

Job programs and youth outreach workers can only be a piece of the puzzle. Relationships between communities and the police will go a long way in preventing and fighting crime. How does your youth action plan focus on building a stronger relationship between the police and the people whom they are there to serve and protect?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, enforcing the law is very important. We have made unprecedented investments to ensure that police have the resources they need.

However, community and police need to work together towards safe communities. The youth action plan focuses on building stronger relationships with the police, so we fast-tracked \$1 million in safer and vital community grants to community organizations. We are also fast-tracking the proceeds of crime program to reinforce coordination among police services and to support police and community groups working together in disadvantaged communities for the next two years. We have increased Crime Stoppers' rewards for gun tips and we're supporting additional gun amnesty programs.

The youth action plan is a balanced approach, and I want to thank everyone who participated.

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TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is to the Minister of Finance this morning. Minister, in the 2012 Ontario budget it states that freezing the salary grid is necessary if the government is to meet its commitment to balance the budget. Minister, if freezing the salary grid is necessary for the government to meet its commitment to balance the budget, as you told the House back in the spring, then why did you bring in legislation that fails to freeze the grid? Should Ontarians take this as a sign that this government can't do it, that they're incapable of doing what they said they would do, or that they have no intention of actually balancing the budget on schedule?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The budget went on to say that we need to negotiate with our partners, and that is the path we took. I want to thank the 55,000 teachers in Ontario who have recognized that. So in fact we're able to keep young teachers working and moving up the grid while all teachers have agreed to take three unpaid PD days. That's precisely what we needed to do in terms of maintaining small class sizes, keeping those 10,000 young teachers and support staff working and taking a pause. In fact, this achieves the fiscal numbers that are laid out clearly in the budget and I believe will help us

keep our education system growing, keep our education system strong and keep our education system the best in the world.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Minister, we all know that you and your government are pretty skilled when it comes to playing a shell game with the government's numbers to put the best face on your abysmal fiscal track record. It's terrible.

But let's deal with the facts here. The bill that you've put forward punches a \$300-million hole in the government's fiscal plan—\$300 million. In April, Standard and Poor's said that Ontario could face further downgrades if the government shows an inability to rein in spending, and that's what you're doing here. You're incapable of doing what you said you were going to do and what needs to be done.

Minister, are you prepared to compromise Ontario's credit rating because you and your government failed to get serious about wage restraint when we gave you the opportunity last spring?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, the agreement that has been reached helps us achieve the numbers we laid out. The number the member put forward, I don't know where he got that. It's simply not accurate.

I will also say this: It is important to work with our partners moving forward, and to make sure that we take a course of action that will survive court challenges. Interestingly enough, the federal government had a recent decision at the appeals court which upholds the process that they entered into, which is very similar to this. The BC court decision was clear. We have to get this right precisely because of the reasons he stipulated. It's about better education, about getting back to balance and doing it in a fair and responsible fashion that takes into consideration the interests of all Ontarians, particularly the young men and women in our schools who are very much a part of the future of this great province.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY EMPLOYEES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. As the Premier knows, the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre is in a state of crisis these days. Today, hundreds of correctional officers are here at Queen's Park showing their support for their co-workers and expressing their frustration with this government's handling of the situation. The corrections workers at the Barton Street jail are highly trained professionals whose personal safety concerns matter, and they should not be ignored.

Is the Premier telling them today they can't exercise their right to refuse unsafe work or else they'll be punished for it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all I want to thank the members of the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention

Centre who are here today for the good work that they're doing all year around, and I'd like to thank the managers who have been working diligently to maintain operations at the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre. I will be, after this question period, meeting with the president of the union.

However, I wanted to say to the member opposite that the Ministry of Labour attended the institution on two separate occasions and spoke with the institution on the third occasion to address the officers' concerns. The rules of the protocol proposed by management were safe and there was no right to refuse to work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There is no reason that this dispute had to escalate to the level that it is now at. I spoke to the minister over a week and a half ago, asking her to intervene in this situation. On Friday, the government rejected the union's request for an arbitrator and refused to negotiate.

The people in my community are the workers in this facility, and the people in my community, along with those workers, want to make sure that this dispute is dealt with. They also want to make sure that these workers are able to do their work with the proper health and safety precautions in place. They want the dispute ended. Everybody wants the dispute ended.

Will the Premier commit to these workers and all Ontario workers that they do have a right to refuse unsafe work and that their employer—even if it's the government of Ontario—cannot discipline them for doing so?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It would be inappropriate to comment on the details of the negotiations as I, an Ontarian, would hate to see a discussion in this House interfere with getting things back to normal. I hope that they will get back to the table and negotiate a return to work.

However, I just wanted to comment on what—yes, that's true; we spoke last Friday. But she asked me one thing. She asked me to convey to the management that the person who was negotiating was not welcome by the union and if I could ask that we change that person, and we did. That's the only thing she asked me, and I delivered on what she asked me.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. The member for Ottawa Centre.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, the responsibility for child care falls under your ministry. As a new dad, I'm continuously gaining further insight on how important quality child care and education are. Parents need to know that their kids are safe when they are dropped off in the morning. I know this government is committed to early learning and full-day kindergarten.

Some members of my community are concerned about the recent closure of Tiny Tots Montessori School, a private facility in the Ottawa area. Will the minister tell this House what the government is doing to ensure that residents of my community have access to reliable and affordable child care?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for giving me the opportunity to address this specific issue in the House. I am aware that the facility has gone out of business, and I can understand how much anxiety and frustration that must be causing for parents. As a mom of young kids, I know how important safe and reliable child care is for parents and families.

That being said, Speaker, it's very important to highlight that private schools like Tiny Tots operate as businesses or non-profit organizations independently of the Ministry of Education.

Our government, though, is very committed to modernizing child care in Ontario. As part of that process, we recently released a discussion paper which seeks input on our long-term vision for child care. We are currently in discussions about ensuring that all parents have access to quality child care that they can count on.

Part of that discussion will include a very frank conversation with the sector about the grandfather clause that is at issue in this circumstance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you to the Minister of Education. Minister, I'm really proud of our government's commitment to early childhood education, and I'm proud of the choices our government is making by continuing to roll out full day kindergarten in our communities and protect the gains that we and teachers have made in our education. Ontario schools are recognized across Canada and around the world for educational excellence. Child care provides a strong foundation for our youngest learners, and as the MPP for Ottawa Centre, I'm happy to hear that this is an active file for the Minister of Education.

Minister, could you please tell this House what the government is doing to support quality child care in Ontario, more specifically in Ottawa?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member from Ottawa Centre is absolutely right: Our government has taken strong action to protect the huge gains we've made in education over the past eight years. The opposition has taken every possible position on full-day kindergarten: cancel it, keep it when it proved to be popular, cancel it again. It's hard to keep track.

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But in sharp contrast, we on this side of the House know that education is the best investment we can make in the future of this province. That's why we want to modernize early learning in Ontario. So on June 27 we released a discussion paper, *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario*. I encourage all interested parties to provide feedback, because we need their best possible advice. That's why we need the advice of the member for Ottawa

Centre in raising that on behalf of his constituents, and we need to have a frank conversation about how we can ensure we have a modern child care system that each and every family can rely on here in Ontario.

HYDRO CORRIDOR

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, every time you show up in Kitchener–Waterloo you try to buy the support of local voters with their own money. Here's some evidence. You promised to build Highway 7—promise made, promise broken. You promised to fund the LRT—promise made, promise broken. You promised more GO trains—promise made, promise broken.

Clearly, you can't strike the right balance between your promises and keeping your word, so I'm going to give you another chance, Premier. Today when you go to Kitchener–Waterloo, will you promise voters that you will direct Hydro One to listen to the Progressive Conservatives and turn maintenance responsibility of the Mary Johnson and Keats Way hydro corridor over to the city of Waterloo, which has pledged not to use herbicides behind their homes?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would remind the member that in your opening statement you tried to indicate that there was a motive, and I would ask you to withdraw that.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'd ask you to withdraw it.

Mr. Michael Harris: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thanks very much. Just about a week and a half ago I was actually in Kitchener–Waterloo and I was walking the very corridor that my colleague is talking about. I won't be political, but I might have been walking with the Liberal candidate, Eric Davis, and a number of residents of the area who wanted to make sure—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, you know the rules. I'd ask you to withdraw that and refrain from indicating—

Interjections.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I was walking the corridor with a number of residents, and they were telling me about the letters that they'd received from Hydro One. Hydro One has 150,000 kilometres of transmission and distribution corridor throughout the province. They need to make sure that they can keep the wires safe, replace and repair them where necessary, and make sure we have reliable power. They were concerned about the letters; they were concerned about the effect on vegetation. I understand that there are some follow-up discussions between the city and Hydro One and a proposed meeting

with the residents for the area. I'm very pleased that that discussion is going to be taking place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier: Premier, this is your chance to show you care for the residents of Kitchener–Waterloo, not just during a by-election but in general. Residents next to the Mary Johnson and Keats Way corridor are concerned that Hydro One is preparing to use class 9 chemicals behind their homes.

Premier, the city of Waterloo has already offered to maintain this corridor without herbicides. After nine years of incompetence, financial mismanagement and broken promises, will you for once in Kitchener–Waterloo listen to residents and allow the city of Waterloo to maintain this corridor, just as the Progressive Conservative Party is demanding?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's sort of interesting. I was just reminded that I believe the party opposite actually voted against our pesticide ban generally in the province of Ontario. But that's a different issue.

As I already indicated, I was able to walk part of the corridor with the residents—very, very helpful residents. We went around some of the streets—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Huron–Bruce, come to order, please.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: There are meetings and discussions that will be taking place with the Hydro One people and the residents, and I'll be very interested in those.

They were also telling me, during our discussion, about some of the changes to the GO service in the Kitchener–Waterloo area—improvements there—and about the changes to Highway 7 and the improvements there. So there seems to be a lot going on there, but I'm very pleased to make sure that there are going to be some discussions involving the corridor.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, people from across northeastern Ontario have been upset with your government's decision to sell off the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. People see this as a short-sighted decision that yet again demonstrates your government's lack of respect and commitment to northern Ontario.

You had originally announced that the sell-off of ONTC would not start until the spring of 2013. Citizens across the north have been organizing in opposition to this sell-off in hopes of getting you to reverse your decision and not sell the ONTC.

Will you admit that your recent announcement to speed up the closure of the Northlander train from the spring of 2013 to September 28 of this year is an attempt on the part of your government to shut down the opposition against the sell-off?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The reality of the situation is that when we made the announcement in late March, we said that we would be shutting down the Northlander. The Northlander is not a sustainable entity. The Northlander costs this government approximately \$12 million a year. Its ridership is less than 50%.

As we move forward with the divestment of the ONTC, we will move forward in a very, very pragmatic way. We will ensure that as we move forward, at the end of the day, we have a far more stable, sustainable, efficient and effective transportation system in place for those along the Highway 11 corridor.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora had previously given notice of a point of privilege. I will recognize the member at this time to state his point. I would also ask the member to give a brief synopsis of his very thorough written point, which has already been made available to me and, I note, delivered to the three House leaders as well.

The member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you, Speaker. On August 22, in accordance with standing order 21(c), I wrote to advise you that I intended to raise a point of privilege at my first available opportunity. This being it, I do so.

Speaker, this point of privilege relates to a disparaging document that was sent to MPPs, the Queen's Park press gallery, numerous other media outlets and, as of yet, an undetermined number of businesses and community organizations. The document, which is unsigned, impugns my integrity and reputation and is clearly intended to intimidate and obstruct me from carrying out my duties as a member of the Legislature, specifically as those duties relate to my responsibilities as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

In addition to being riddled with false and misleading information, the document accuses me of having been involved in criminal activities. A copy of that document, which was first distributed on July 30, was delivered to you with my notice to you on August 22.

I have referred this matter to the Ontario Provincial Police with a request that this document, which I believe falls under the Criminal Code of Canada's definition of defamatory libel and intimidation of a justice system participant, be reviewed in the context of sections 289, 299 and 423.1 of the Criminal Code of Canada, and that this matter be investigated and that every effort be made to determine the source.

There can be no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that this document was created and distributed with the express purpose of damaging my reputation and intimidating me in my role as a parliamentarian.

Parliamentary privilege is defined by Erskine May as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House

collectively ... and by members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions..." O'Brien and Bosc further describe "peculiar rights" as the rights members share collectively and the rights each individual member has.

In particular, I draw your attention to a member's right to be free from "obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation." I emphasize these privileges because I feel that this document has unduly interfered with my work here in this chamber, with my responsibilities and duties as a member on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and in general with my role as a parliamentarian.

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Parliamentary authority states that "It is impossible to codify all incidents which might be interpreted as matters of obstruction, interference, molestation or intimidation and as such constitute prima facie cases of privilege. However, some matters found to be prima facie include the damaging of a member's reputation ... the intimidation of members and their staff and of witnesses before committees..."

O'Brien and Bosc also note that "Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its members free from intimidation."

Furthermore, O'Brien and Bosc state that the unjust—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I ask the member to summarize? I was looking for a brief synopsis, not a complete synopsis.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, with all due respect, this is incredibly important to all members of the House. I beg your indulgence.

Further, O'Brien and Bosc state that "The unjust damaging of a member's good name might be seen as constituting an obstruction if the member is prevented from performing his or her parliamentary functions."

They illustrate this using a 1987 ruling from Speaker Fraser that states that "The privileges of a member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfilment of his or her duties and functions. It is obvious that the unjust damaging of a reputation could constitute such an impediment."

The document in question was created in an attempt to impugn my reputation and in an attempt to impede my work as a parliamentarian, my duties here in this chamber and my work on the public accounts committee's investigation of the scandal at Ornge. It is evident from the very first sentence of the document in question that its contents and distribution are directly tied to my work on the investigation into Ornge.

As you know, I've spoken on this issue numerous times during debate and question period. I have raised the issue through questions to the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health and the government House leader, and I have examined numerous witnesses in my duties as a member of the public accounts committee investigating the Ornge scandal. It is in the context of my work on this file that the document calls into question my ability "to question anyone else's integrity." It is

obvious that this statement is referring to my questions relating to the Ornge scandal in the Legislature and the examination of witnesses who have come before that committee to testify concerning their involvement at Ornge. It is clear that this defamation campaign was designed to intimidate me from carrying on with that work.

Speaker, I draw your attention to a recent case of precedent involving Public Safety Minister Vic Toews and the group Anonymous. The group published videos on the Internet which made various allegations about Mr. Toews's public life and also made specific threats, all of which was in reaction to Mr. Toews's introduction of Bill C-30.

On February 27, 2012, Mr. Toews rose on a point of privilege, arguing that the threatened actions of the videos constituted an attempt to intimidate him in his role as a member of Parliament. House of Commons Speaker Andrew Scheer ruled that this case constituted a prima facie question of privilege because the language used in the videos "does indeed constitute a direct threat to the minister in particular, as well as other members. These threats demonstrate a flagrant disregard of our traditions and a subversive attack on the most fundamental privileges of this House."

Speaker Scheer stated in his ruling, "When duly elected members are personally threatened for their work in Parliament, whether introducing a bill, making a statement or casting a vote, this House must take the matter very seriously."

In addition, former Speaker of the House of Commons Lucien Lamoureux stated in a 1973 ruling that there is "no hesitation in reaffirming the principle that parliamentary privilege includes the right of a member to discharge his responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts at intimidation."

Mr. Speaker, it's evident that this document was created and distributed with the explicit purpose of damaging my reputation as a parliamentarian, in an attempt to discredit my role as a parliamentarian in the investigation of the scandal at Ornge. I appreciate the fact that vigorous debate can and does occur in this House. However, there is a fine line between freedom of speech and this document, which was designed with the sole purpose of intimidating me as a member of this Legislature and damaging my reputation.

Joseph Maingot, in *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, offers insight into the delicate balance between critical speech and a breach of privilege or contempt: "[A]ll interferences with members' privileges of freedom of speech, such as editorials and other public comment, are not breaches of privilege even though they influence the conduct of members in their parliamentary work.... But any attempt by improper means to influence" or obstruct a member in his parliamentary conduct may constitute contempt. Using the criteria set out by Maingot, it is apparent that this document is the latter. It was meant to influence my parliamentary work on the public accounts committee and here in this chamber.

Lastly, former House of Commons Speaker Gilbert Parent on March 24, 1994, stated, "Threats of blackmail

or intimidation of a member of Parliament should never be taken lightly. When such occurs, the very essence of free speech is undermined. Without the guarantee of freedom of speech, no member of Parliament can do his duty as is expected."

Speaker, I've had the privilege of serving as a member of the Ontario Legislature since 1995 and over the course of those years have often been on the forefront of contentious issues. Vigorous debate is not unfamiliar to any of us, and as parliamentarians, we accept that from time to time we'll be subject to attack and ridicule. We learn to cope with that dimension of our calling. This document, however, crosses the line, and I am compelled to bring it to your attention and to the attention of this House and to request that you review this matter to determine whether a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred. I also ask that every effort be made and that the necessary resources be made available to determine the source of the document.

As parliamentarians, we must be able to investigate and study issues freely without being intimidated. If we do not deal with this issue and we leave these tactics unaddressed, we put the rights and privileges of all members of this Legislature in jeopardy.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Everyone sit, please.

The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I rise as the House leader for the New Democratic Party. I'm not going to go through all the points that were made by the honourable member; I think those were made, they're written to you and you have a chance to review them. But I want to add a couple of points to what was said.

First of all, I think that when we see these types of attacks on individuals, it's not only when the member rises in his debate that's at question; I think it's politics in general. It seems that we're more and more these days, rather than talking about ideas and about how we can build a better province and a better country or a better municipality—politics seems to be devolving to "gotcha" kind of politics and these types of attacks which, I think, are more an American style of politics than a Canadian style of politics.

As the Speaker, I think you have to take a look at this from that perspective. There are many, many people who may be thinking that they want, one day, to run for the municipal council, their school boards, their federal or provincial government, and they're looking at instances like this and saying, "Why would I get involved when it's not about ideas; it's about how you attack the other person and put them down?" In that light, I think you need to take a look at this to send a very strong message to say that, in fact, these types of attacks should not have any place in Canadian politics.

We tend to be, as parliamentary systems, contrary to our American brothers and sisters, a system where, yes, we have very vigorous debate in these Legislatures; yes, we have differences of opinion, but that's where the

debate should happen. It should be on the opinion and on the ideas, and not against the actual individual. I would ask you to keep that in mind when making your ruling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: Speaker, I would like to speak to this too. I found out about this a couple of days ago. I'm obviously a Liberal member of the chamber, but I, too, am a member of the public accounts committee.

While the member opposite and I have very differing views regarding a whole host of political issues in this chamber and we do have a difference of view of various issues that are before the public accounts committee and we have debated and indeed sparred at that committee, but in the best parliamentary tradition and within the traditional bounds that we carry on that sort of debate and sparring.

1150

Having said that, I have read over the anonymous—anonymous—letter, and I stress the word “anonymous.” I read over the details of it, and I am appalled that that sort of a letter would be sent out by someone out there in the community on an anonymous basis to members of this chamber, to all of the various people that the member for Newmarket–Aurora spoke to. There's a list of people to whom this document has gone out.

If this can happen to the member for Newmarket–Aurora, it can happen to me, it can happen to any of the 107 members in this chamber. What it does is put a chill on how a member might conduct himself in the hot and heavy of political debate. Because these allegations are so over the top that you would not want to—I can understand someone would not want to do anything to further the circulation of those. But they're already out there, and I think, Speaker, that the member opposite has made a compelling argument for a case of privilege.

I think, and I ask every member in this chamber to think—regardless of your political affiliation, regardless of the issue, you should take a few minutes and read the letter over and ask yourself if you would want something like that out there floating around in this hypermedia world, the world of emails, the world of Twitter, the world of Facebook. At some point we have to draw a line, and I think, Speaker, that you should rule that there's a breach of member's privilege here.

I'd take it a step further, Speaker, and I'd suggest that you might want to refer this to the legislative committee on the assembly here to root out this; have the committee look at it and have the committee issue its findings in a clear statement that we will not tolerate this kind of conduct that puts a chill on our responsibilities here as members.

I'm quite prepared to debate any member of this chamber in committee or in this House, but always within the parameters of the facts of truthfulness and of respectful opinion. But these anonymous drive-by slurs—you know, it used to be in the old days somebody would put a rumour out there and it would fester and it would do harm. It would do harm to your family; it would do

harm to the work that the members do here. But now people put these things out and it's more than just a rumour, it gets out there in that great media world, and the potential for damage and chill on the work that all of us here have to do as members is dramatic.

I've got the greatest of differences with my federal Conservative colleagues in Ottawa, and I have my opinions on matters that public safety minister Vic Toews has taken up. But he got involved in that drive-by when some anonymous group put out something on the Internet and the Speaker made a ruling, and I'm very sympathetic to that ruling. I think he made the right ruling. Similarly with Speaker Parent back in 1994, there were rumours that somebody had put out there anonymously, and he said, “Threats of blackmail or intimidation of a member of Parliament should never be taken lightly. When such occurs, the very essence of free speech is undermined. Without the guarantee of freedom of freedom of speech, no member of Parliament can do his duty as expected.”

Speaker, I think there is a breach of privilege here. I think we might want to refer this to committee and just find out what is going on here. It's a forum; it's a way that we can protect ourselves and protect the traditions of this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, because the honourable member from Newmarket–Aurora has made a thorough submission to you, and we had the opportunity to hear the points this afternoon, I just want to congratulate one of the most highly respected members of this Legislature, Frank Klees, the honourable member from Newmarket–Aurora, for having the courage to come forward. Not everyone would have heard the original news report, but by Frank coming forward again, he's willing to put his neck out there on behalf of all of us so that this does not happen or be allowed to happen again.

I thank the member for Timmins–James Bay on behalf of our caucus and all members and the honourable member from Willowdale for their support and, I assume, their caucuses' support. Somebody out there or some people out there did a dirty, evil thing and I agree with the member from Willowdale that perhaps in your ruling, Mr. Speaker, you could refer this matter or suggest the matter be referred to a legislative committee or a special committee so that we can get to the bottom of this and put measures in place to ensure that this is minimized in the future and that the public out there gets the message that there are certain privileges that we need to have in order to represent them properly and freely in a free and democratic society.

Mr. Klees should be applauded for his bravery in bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Member for Haldimand–Norfolk, on the same point of privilege?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes it is. Further to comments by Mr. Klees, Mr. Bisson, Mr. Zimmer and Mr. Wilson, late last month I wrote the Speaker a letter highlighting other forms of intimidation that have taken place during the

public accounts study of the Ornge scandal. I'd just like to highlight a few.

In April, I received a letter from a lawyer representing Don Guy attempting to intimidate me with a lawsuit after I questioned the Deputy Premier about Mr. Guy's involvement in the Ornge scandal, on April 19, 2012. I subsequently raised this letter in the House during question period on April 26. I feel this was an attempt to intimidate me from asking further questions on this issue and from performing my duties and my role as MPP.

On Twitter, Grahame Rivers, the Premier's former social media coordinator, attempted to intimidate Norm Miller, chair of the committee. I do know, and the House knows—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I asked the member if his standing up was on the same point of privilege. The information you provided is on a totally different issue. So unless you want to stick to this particular issue—

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. I won't talk about the other examples of intimidation.

Just to again focus most recently, the reason we are discussing this, as you have pointed out, is that my colleague on the public accounts committee Frank Klees, MPP for Newmarket–Aurora, became subject of the smear campaign that has been discussed in this Legislature. As we know, letters about Mr. Klees were sent to MPPs and the Queen's Park press gallery in an attempt to impugn his character, an attempt to intimidate him from participating in the study of Ornge. The timing of the letter, Speaker, one day prior to the reconvening of the public accounts committee, demonstrates the direct attempt by someone—someone anonymous—to discredit and impugn Mr. Klees. Most recently, Mr. Bruce Wade, a whistle-blower pilot, was suspended. You may rule this out of order, but there are many other examples of intimidation, Speaker, beyond what is happening to our colleague Mr. Frank Klees—or all of us in this House.

Obstructionist tactics demonstrate an overarching campaign of intimidation. You've asked me not to talk about the other examples. This must be addressed. This must be investigated.

Again, parliamentary authority states that all of us in this Legislature have the freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation, molestation. O'Brien and Bosc have been quoted, and I bring out another quote: "Members need to function unimpeded" regardless of our work.

As such, I as well respectfully request you look into this trend, these intimidation tactics that are being employed during this very important study of the Ornge scandal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a separate point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let me finish with this one first.

I just want to thank Mr. Klees for his very thorough written point that he submitted to the Speaker's office. I also want to thank the member for Timmins–James Bay, the member for Willowdale, the member for Sim-

coe–Grey and the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for their input.

We will take all this information, and I reserve my decision, to be rendered at a later date.

The member for Pembroke—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Earlier today, during question period, in response to a question from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga—and we recognize, Speaker, that the constituents of Kitchener–Waterloo do not currently have a member in this Legislature, but they have the right to have their issues raised in the Legislature. In response to that, the Minister of Energy used the name of the Liberal candidate in that riding in a by-election. That has specifically been ruled out of order in the past, and I would ask that you would make a specific ruling condemning that practice on the part of the Minister of Energy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I accept your comment. If you would recall, at the time I asked the minister to withdraw the name in his comments, and he so did.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I did not notice you rise, Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Well, I did. We could check the Hansard. I'm definite that I did that.

There being no deferred votes today, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1201 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to welcome to the House today Larry and Mary McDonald from Strathroy, Ontario, and their family. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Introductions? There being none, members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LARRY McDONALD

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you again, Speaker. I am pleased to share with the Ontario Legislature today my congratulations to a constituent and a friend of mine, Larry McDonald. Today I presented Larry with Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Award here at Queen's Park.

Larry has been a long-time resident of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, and I am very thankful for all the contributions he has made to his community.

Larry graduated with a bachelor of commerce degree from the University of Ottawa in 1965. From there, he

made his way to the town of Strathroy in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for work, and there he met his lovely wife, Mary.

In 1973, Larry became the dealer principal of the Chevy Oldsmobile GM dealership in Strathroy. He owned that business until he sold it about 30 years later, back in 2002.

While having a successful career in business, Larry always made time for his community, volunteering for VON, as a board member of his church diocese, and fund-raising for his local hospital.

Larry is also the former chair of the Ontario Waste Management Association, and was also involved in fund-raising at the Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital.

I'm very proud to have presented this prestigious award to Larry and to welcome him, his family and friends to Queen's Park today. Congratulations.

EVENTS IN HAMILTON MOUNTAIN

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome all members back to the House—earlier than we expected, but so be it.

Like other members, my summer was filled with many events: barbecues such as the one hosted by the Filipino community of Hamilton Mountain; celebrations like the 20th anniversary of the Stoneworth Co-op, a model of affordable housing known as one of the greenest co-ops in Hamilton. I enjoyed morning prayers celebrating Eid at the Hamilton Mountain Mosque in the celebration of Ramadan. These are just a few of the events that I had the great pleasure to attend over the past couple of months, events that demonstrated to me what a wonderful community the group of Hamilton Mountain residents are.

My summer also gave me the opportunity to deal with many of my constituents, with the desperate lack of affordable housing that I heard of, and people who are confused about the change of payments in the Trillium benefit plans. I visited with corrections officers outside of the Hamilton—Wentworth Detention Centre who only want a safe workplace that we can provide. I heard from constituents who had surgeries cancelled and rescheduled thanks to ministry cuts in health—patients suffering from chronic pain.

The list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker. You know, if I had the time, I could go on about many concerns that I heard from Hamilton Mountain residents, but that is my time for today.

SIKH TEMPLE SHOOTING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart to condemn a horrific tragedy that happened at the Oak Creek Sikh Temple in Wisconsin on August 5. Seven innocent worshippers were gunned down by a supremacist.

My heart goes out to the victims and their families. I have struggled to understand the deviant mind of the heartless killer who attacked innocence, civility and

tolerance. There is no place for racism and intolerance in a civil society. Violence in any way, form and shape is unacceptable and must be condemned.

No words can express my thanks to the police officers for their swift and heroic action to prevent further tragedy and save lives.

I share the views of President Barack Obama that together we must condemn all acts of violence with a powerful and strong voice but in a peaceful manner.

May I ask that this House observe a moment of silence in the memory of those who were killed in a senseless shooting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested unanimous consent for observing a moment of silence. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: There is outrage in northeastern Ontario over how this government is proceeding with the dismantling of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. Despite the indisputable evidence I have presented that this fire sale at Ontario Northland will achieve no savings, the Minister of Northern Development this month announced he is proceeding with the shutdown of the Northlander passenger rail service.

It's obvious to northerners that this government had no plan going into this fire sale, and it still doesn't. There has been no effort by this minister to consult northerners about this. My colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka and I took the time this summer to travel 1,600 kilometres up north and back to discuss with the stakeholders across the north their very concerns. We heard from them loud and clear. They said to us, "We want to be at the table." They said to us, "Tell us what you're doing. The uncertainty is creating economic instability in the region." Those are their words, not ours. One forest products company did tell us that they are halting a \$10-million expansion due to the uncertainty that has been created by this government. That was \$10 million cancelled this summer.

This minister does not have the confidence of the people of northern Ontario. The president of the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce has called for him to resign. The unions that represent the men and women who work at Ontario Northland call for him to retire—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Time is up. Thank you.

CASINOS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I've spent much of the past summer talking to my constituents door to door about the proposal to put a casino in downtown Toronto, and frankly, one of those casino sites that is discussed is in the port lands, in my riding. Ontario Place and the CNE surely have more coverage, but I have to tell you, residents of

my riding have been recruited to focus groups run by OLG to test arguments as to why the port lands would be a good location.

Speaker, we already have significant traffic problems in my riding. People know that any casino development will not be transit-oriented, but will be car-oriented. We have a thriving film industry down there. It needs an infrastructure built out that will support film, not casinos. We also have substantial social problems related to addiction; we don't need more of them.

Premier McGuinty needs to understand that he is facing a huge number of people, a vast majority of residents in my riding and across downtown Toronto, who reject casino-based development. I urge the Premier to rethink his plans, withdraw the proposal, support the towns that do want to retain their racetracks, and address the needs that we, the people of Ontario, have.

1310

OLYMPIC ATHLETES

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to start the session on a positive note. This summer, we had the opportunity to cheer on our Canadian athletes during the London 2012 Olympic games. We watched Olympians test their strength in sports as they competed for a spot on the podium. Canada had a strong performance, with 18 medals in total: 12 bronze, five silver and, I am proud to say, one Olympic gold medal, earned by Rosie MacLennan, a constituent of mine from King City in the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, for her performance in women's trampolining. Oak Ridges–Markham's presence in trampolining was enhanced by three-time Olympic medallist Karen Cockburn from Stouffville, who successfully placed fourth, and Jason Burnett from Nobleton, who represented Canada in the men's competition, placing eighth.

Oak Ridges–Markham is home to a number of athletes who participated in the games, and I would like to congratulate all of them on their achievements. Congratulations to Eric Lamaze, 2008 gold-medal-winning equestrian rider from King City, who competed with his new horse, Derly Chin de Muze; and Michelle Li of Markham, who battled in a bronze medal badminton match with her partner, Alex Bruce.

The opportunity to compete in the Olympics is a result of passion, commitment and perseverance, and we are proud of all our athletes. I look forward to celebrating Canadian successes during the London Paralympic games from August 29 until September 9.

ANNA LEIBENKO

Mr. Peter Shurman: Over a week ago, Anna Leibenko, a 24-year-old York region resident, was rushed to a hospital in Split, Croatia, after suffering serious injuries in an accident during an excursion on the Adriatic Sea. She has been put into a medically induced coma and is in critical condition, and her family is desperately trying to find a way to transport Anna home

so she can receive care in Ontario. Fundraising efforts are under way to raise enough money to cover the costs of Anna's care in the hospital and the cost of transport. Transporting Anna back to Ontario alone will cost about \$93,000.

In these difficult circumstances, Thornhill and York region residents have yet again shown how tightly knit and committed our community is. York region residents and businesses, as well as Ontarians from many corners of the province, have answered the call and made donations to this important cause. This is yet another example of what makes the York region community the great place it is in which to live.

I wish to recognize the efforts of all those who have made donations and encourage all members of this Legislature, as well as all Ontarians, to make their contribution to help bring Anna home. Anna's family is on the way to raising the funds needed, but there is still more to be done. To get more information on how you can donate, please go to help-anna-leibenko.org, or visit my own website, petershurman.com.

EDUCATION

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It's my pleasure to rise today to share with this House the result of our government's continued investment in student success. Mr. Speaker, while the economy is still facing tremendous uncertainty, the McGuinty government has seized every advantage to bring a strong future for Ontarians and our students. Our educators, teachers, students and their parents in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East and across the province deserve immeasurable credit for this success. It's because of their hard work that graduation rates are up 14% from 2003, to 83% in 2012. That's 93,000 more students who graduated thanks to our student success strategies. I'm proud that the Pan Canadian Assessment Program showed that Ontario students are the only ones in this country who have achieved above the national average in math, reading and science—and they lead the country in reading. PISA, an OECD organization, confirmed that Ontario students are among the best in the world—definitely something to celebrate.

Through programs such as specialist high-skills majors, expanded co-op education and dual credit, we've worked hard to give Ontario students the chance to develop strengths, interests and goals. That means students in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East and throughout Ontario will have the education they need to compete for highly skilled jobs. We recognize that investing in our school system is important to publicly funded education, and in investing in student success, we will continue to make students and education a top priority for Ontario.

McKENNA MODLER

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a privilege to rise today to celebrate McKenna Modler, a remarkable, courageous girl from the village of Lansdowne.

Eighteen months ago, 12-year-old McKenna was diagnosed with a brain tumour and has since undergone a grueling series of 70 chemotherapy treatments. McKenna's brave and tenacious fight makes her an inspiration to those facing a serious challenge in life. But by transforming her personal battle into something much larger, McKenna has become a hero.

While undergoing her treatment, McKenna was moved to action by what she saw in the hospital. As she told a newspaper reporter, "When I saw some of the kids, you know, especially the little kids, they're crying and upset. You see some of the parents; they are just stressed out."

Determined not only to beat her cancer but to make a difference in the lives of kids and families on a similar journey, she launched her McKenna's Dream fundraiser. With the support of her parents Erin and Scott and her brothers Bryson and Cole, McKenna quickly rallied the community to her side. I was honoured to attend her fundraising event at the Lansdowne fairgrounds this summer, and earlier this month she presented a cheque for \$96,000 to the children's cancer fund at the Cancer Centre of Southeastern Ontario in Kingston. She has since surpassed the \$100,000 mark, and this incredible journey just keeps getting better. She recently won the regional round of the Scotiabank Game Changers contest, putting her one step closer to a national award and another \$100,000 donation to her cause.

I urge everyone to get behind this determined little girl by voting for McKenna at scotiabankgamechangers.com. Let's help make McKenna's dream come true.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Jackson assumes ballot item number 51 and Mr. Milligan assumes ballot item number 53.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated August 15, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report on the committee's request for documents from the Ministry

of Energy from the Standing Committee on Estimates and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Michael Prue: Briefly, Mr. Speaker, this was a contentious debate around this issue. It took some seven hours before it was finally decided on the recommendation itself. It took place over many days, but ultimately the decision was made, and I ask that the Speaker rule on the recommendation. And I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Prue moves the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Ms. Broten moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would inform the audience that there shall be no signs or placards in the House. Can I have the Sergeant-at-Arms take action?

The Minister of Education has moved An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector, and that it now be read for the first time. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion be approved? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Does the minister wish to make a statement?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'll make my statements during ministerial statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

CONTRATS DES ENSEIGNANTES ET ENSEIGNANTS

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today on behalf of the Ontario families and students who are already preparing for the school year. I rise on behalf of Ontario taxpayers looking to our government to be responsible stewards of the province's finances. It is acting in their best interests, and in the

public interest, Mr. Speaker, that today our government introduces the proposed Putting Students First Act. If passed, this legislation would ensure that labour agreements between unions and school boards reflect the province's fiscal reality while protecting this government's investments in our publicly funded education system, a system that is among the best in the English-speaking world.

The gains we have made by working together over the last nine years are extraordinary. Class sizes are smaller. Full-day kindergarten is rolling out and will be in about 1,700 schools this September. Test scores are up, and more students are graduating than ever before. We are preserving these gains while protecting 10,000 teaching positions.

Face à cette conjoncture financière difficile, nos choix donnent la priorité aux élèves en protégeant leur expérience de classe et en maintenant les enseignants et le personnel de soutien dans les écoles.

If passed, this legislation would ensure that the school year starts on time and continues uninterrupted, with the tools in place to prevent labour disruptions.

We did not make the decision to introduce legislation lightly. It is a tough but necessary step. After six months and 300 hours of sincere discussions held in good faith and significant give and take on the government's initial position, we were able to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, OECTA. This agreement served as a road map for future deals, resulting in more memorandums of understanding with the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO, and the Association of Professional Student Services Personnel, APSSP. Four school boards have passed motions to sign on to these memorandums. These are important agreements signed by 55,000 teachers and at boards with 162,000 students. But still, taken together, these agreements represent only 34% of Ontario's teachers and four of 72 school boards.

Ontario families need certainty that the school year will start on time and be free from labour disruptions. More importantly for the future, all of us who depend on the health of Ontario's public finances and our economy need certainty that, come September 1, a significant number of teachers will not receive an automatic 5.5% pay increase and accumulate two million more bankable sick days that could be paid out upon retirement.

We should make no mistake: All of us who depend on and benefit from our public services and all of us who pay for them have a stake in the government's fiscal plan towards a balanced budget. The implementation of the fiscal plan is important for the health of our public finances and our economy and for the maintenance of our public services now and into the future. The long-term sustainability of our public education system depends on us making tough but important decisions that will ensure we are on a balanced, sustainable pathway forward.

This proposed bill ensures that compensation within our school system, a \$17-billion public sector wage bill

every year representing 85% of education spending, responsibly and fairly accords with the fiscal plan. That is why, after six months of difficult discussions with our partners, we are left with no other responsible choice but to proceed to introduce legislation that would ensure fair, balanced and responsible labour agreements and civility in our schools.

Before we introduced this legislation here in the House, we took the rare step of releasing the Putting Students First Act publicly and to the opposition. We did receive constructive feedback from Her Majesty's loyal opposition, and that's why the bill you see now has changes that reflect their advice, without amending the memorandum of understanding we signed with OECTA after over 300 hours of discussions. We incorporated these changes into the bill before introduction to help speed the bill's passage.

Je demande avec insistance aux députés des deux côtés de cette Assemblée de prendre le temps d'examiner attentivement ce projet de loi. Je leur demande avec insistance de défendre les intérêts supérieurs des élèves et de tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes qui dépendent d'un système d'éducation public viable.

If passed, the Putting Students First Act would ensure labour and employment contracts fit the government's fiscal and policy priorities and contain measures to secure two years free from labour disruption.

If passed, the act would require that local agreements include provisions and parameters consistent with those in the OECTA memorandum of understanding, including a 0% salary increase in 2012-13 and 2013-14, and the freezing of retirement gratuity entitlements for the payment of unused sick days moving forward. If passed, the Putting Students First Act will save the province \$2 billion, will avert an expenditure of \$473 million, and at the same time will ensure that we don't take our foot off the pedal of student achievement, that we continue to see progress in our schools, and that we roll out full-day kindergarten and keep our classes small.

Mr. Speaker, we have been fair, balanced and responsible in our discussions with our partners. We have fully engaged in the process of good-faith consultation and consideration. The proposed act reflects the culmination of that process. But we are running out of time. We must take strong action, and we must take it now, to give students, parents and taxpayers the certainty they deserve while being fair to our education partners.

L'adoption de la Loi donnant priorité aux élèves avant le 1^{er} septembre apporterait cette certitude et cette équité. Passing the Putting Students First Act before September 1 will deliver that certainty and fairness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Response?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to say thanks, Mr. Speaker, to Tim Hudak for giving me the opportunity today to respond on this legislation. I want to first do something—I know that there are two gentlemen in the assembly right now who we may not agree with but who I've always

maintained a very open relationship with on where we stand in the Ontario PC caucus. I know we may not agree, but I certainly respect Ken Coran with the OSSTF, and Sam Hammond, who is here for ETFO. I want to say thanks for coming here today. I know that legislation can be quite heated and controversial, and I know that from time to time in this assembly we may agree and we may disagree, but we have debate.

I received an email from one of my constituents today, and the title was "I put students first every day." Now, I will say this: I know that. I suspect every member of this assembly knows that Ontario's teachers put students first. And I suspect every member of this assembly will do the same.

About five weeks ago, maybe six weeks ago, the official opposition started hearing rumblings that the House may be recalled. We were told there may be legislation in the offing as a result of the OECA agreement. At the time, we had reservations, and we still were not told whether or not we would be coming back to the assembly early in order to debate legislation. We kept an open mind, in the official opposition. We waited to see if it was true. A couple of weeks ago, I received an email, or a phone call, from the Minister of Education. At that time, I indicated on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus that we would keep an open mind; we would look at this legislation and we would put the interests of students first, and what the economy would be, and what the government's end goals on debt and deficit would be. At the time, we made sure that we conveyed our concerns regarding the OECA road map, the \$300-million hole that we saw as a result of the movement on the grid for about 40% of the teachers. We also, at the time, shared our concerns about stripping and usurping the rights of school board trustees who were duly elected in their communities, as well as the role of principals in our system.

1330

We had been calling, Speaker—and this is no surprise to you—for a legislated wage freeze for over a year now, across the board, throughout all the broader public service. Our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, has been standing strong on that initiative for over a year now, as a lawyer, explaining to this government that it can be done. Our critic for finance, Peter Shurman, has stood in his place asking questions to the Minister of Finance, demanding that we bring in these extraordinary measures for such extraordinary times. Our leader, Tim Hudak, not only has been calling for this in the assembly, he has met with the Premier, telling him that we need an across-the-board wage freeze for all public servants, regardless of what they do in public life, because we are in financial difficulties in this province. He met with the Premier last November. My colleague Jeff Yurek put forward a private member's bill in May that would have dealt with this issue. The Liberals voted against it. Now we are at this point, two weeks early to the assembly—which should have started in September—because this government didn't get the job done.

Well, we're happy to bail them out, and we're going to continue to call for our legislated wage freeze across all government. There are still 3,999 collective agreements to be dealt with this year. This is a small part of a broader problem we have as a province, a province that is facing a \$30-billion deficit, a \$411-billion debt. This province is sick because this government didn't do anything about our finances for the past nine years.

So we're at this point at the assembly. We are talking with the government. I have made a commitment on behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, to the Minister of Education that we would work with them, but we still have concerns. We have concerns about their gap, their \$300-million hole. We have concerns that they're stripping the rights of boards and trustees, and, Speaker, we have concerns that students aren't going to be in the classroom on September 1. That's why the Ontario PC caucus will stand up, look at this legislation, and we will make sure that kids are in their classrooms come September, because that's what the official opposition should do and that's what the government should have done a long time ago.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can everyone sit, please?

Response?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as everyone in this chamber is aware, strange things happen in Ontario when Liberals get close to an election day. Strange things happen. In 2011, this government faced problems in Mississauga and Etobicoke. It was not going where it wanted to go in terms of votes. The Premier, who had commissioned the construction of a gas-fired power plant, decided, "You know what? I need those seats. I know the people of Ontario will pay. I'll cancel this plant, I'll roll the dice, and frankly, we'll go forward and we'll win those seats." Well, he won the seats, and we got stuck with the bill.

Fast-forward to today. What is it, 10 days to the September 6th election? Something like that. A government facing difficulty with two by-elections decides that it needs to create a crisis and that it needs to show that it can solve the crisis that it created. It decides that the parents, the students, the women and men who educate the children of our province, who look after the schools—they're all expendable, because in the end, all that matters is winning that by-election. All that matters is winning that by-election.

We have said that this bill poses huge financial risk, that we asked the minister to bring forward the legal opinion showing that, in fact, there wouldn't be a constitutional risk, that we wouldn't be put in the same position as the government of British Columbia when they had to put out \$100 million for acting this way.

I listened to the government earlier this year when they condemned the official opposition for their wage freeze bill, told us it was reckless, unconstitutional,

damaging. That was then; this is now. They have an election to win and they don't care. They don't care what happens to parents, they don't care what happens to students, they don't care what happens to teachers, custodians, school psychologists—any of those people. So that is what we're facing today.

A few weeks ago, Speaker, I got a call from the minister. I heard from Lisa MacLeod, the opposition critic. The government was bringing forward a bill to make sure that the schools opened at the beginning of the school year. Well, I hadn't heard that there was going to be a strike or a lockout happening at the beginning of the year. It was news to me, so I phoned trustee friends. They were beside themselves: "Are you kidding me? We're getting ready to negotiate." Their approach was a practical one: roll up your sleeves, recognize there's a problem, figure out how the parents, the students, the people who work in our schools can come out of this with an agreement that makes sense for the whole of Ontario.

That isn't the direction that this government decided to take. This government decided, solely because it needs to win these by-elections, that it would frighten the parents and people in Ontario by saying that the school year was in jeopardy. This government turned its back on discussions, turned its back on trying to find agreements with the people who work for us, and brought in this bill.

Yesterday I had an opportunity to talk to some high school students who, first of all, I have to say, find the title of the bill outrageously funny, because they are students. They deal with situations where they rely on guidance teachers, whose numbers are being cut in their schools, the people they rely on to deal with psychological counselling, to deal with bullying. They couldn't believe that a government that had done what it had done in education had the gall to use the title "Putting Students First."

Speaker, it is clear that this bill will not serve the people of Ontario well, will not help our children, our students, our families. It will not help the people, the women and men who work in our schools. It will help a government politically. This bill needs to be defeated.

VISITORS

Mr. John Yakabuski: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Pembroke-Nipissing-Renfrew.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much. I'm asking you all these points of orders because I want you to get that riding right.

In the gallery today, Speaker—and I apologize; I was in a meeting and I couldn't introduce them at the appointed time, but I'm begging your indulgence. From Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, my county of Renfrew, I have with us today Allison Ryan from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario; Jeff Barber from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; Colleen Mackin, also from ETFO; Joan Bradley from ETFO; and

Sherri Madore, a teacher from Renfrew county. Welcome to Queen's Park. Thanks for joining us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Welcome.

As the member knows, that's not a point of order.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition from a number of residents in Leeds-Grenville, and also residents next door, from Mr. McDonell's riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the member churches of the Seaway Valley Presbytery are subject to the provisions of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08; and

"Whereas these churches and other non-profit organizations in eastern Ontario's rural communities cannot afford to pay for the expensive testing required by this regulation or the volunteers to transport water samples to provincially accredited laboratories in urban centres hours away; and

"Whereas public health laboratories have the equipment necessary to conduct the testing required under Ontario regulation 319/08;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Health amends Ontario regulation 319/08 to allow non-profit organizations to have water testing done at existing public health laboratories at no cost."

I'm pleased to sign the petition and send it to the table with page Roberto.

1340

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM OFFICE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Petitions? The member for—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Beaches-East York.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): — Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. No, sorry; I've got the wrong one.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Speaker, what about rotation?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Elgin-Middlesex-London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario" has "decided to close the Ontario disability support program office in St. Thomas, an office which serves over 3,245 ... of our

most vulnerable population throughout St. Thomas and Elgin county;

"Whereas the government of Ontario made this decision without consultation;

"Whereas the majority of clients don't have access to transportation to London to attend appointments with their caseworker, which may result in loss of benefits;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Community and Social Services consult with the city of St. Thomas and Elgin county to find a solution to keep the ODSP office open in St. Thomas."

Speaker, the minister met with the delegation from Elgin county and St. Thomas. We hope that he responds to our request as soon as possible.

I agree to this petition and I sign my signature to it.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): My apologies to the member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints into the areas of hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities; and

"Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate any of these areas; and

"Whereas people wronged by these institutions are left feeling helpless and most have nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities."

I am in agreement, will affix my signature thereto and send it with page Louis.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Interjections: Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): They've shifted all the seats on me. Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. Sorry.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He's a Milligan.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people, creates \$1.5 billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

"Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

"Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario's agricultural and rural economies."

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it to the clerks' desk with page Katie.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I support this petition. I'll affix my name to it and give it to page Gopi.

INFRASTRUCTURE ROUTIÈRE

M. Phil McNeely: « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu qu'il y a actuellement une étude de l'évaluation environnementale des liaisons interprovinciales en cours afin de trouver l'emplacement d'un nouveau pont traversant la rivière des Outaouais à l'est du centre-ville d'Ottawa;

« Attendu que la province de l'Ontario investit 220 millions de dollars pour améliorer l'échangeur 417/174 et élargir la 417 de l'échangeur à la rue Nicholas;

« Attendu que ces améliorations ont été autorisées afin de répondre à un besoin urgent des navetteurs d'Orléans et des régions environnantes;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral a démenagé près de 5 000 emplois de la GRC du centre-ville à Barrhaven;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral va déplacer 10 000 emplois du ministère de la Défense nationale du centre-ville à Kanata;

« Attendu que plus de la moitié de ces emplois étaient occupés par des résidents d'Orléans et des communautés environnantes;

« Attendu que le déplacement de ces emplois aura un impact drastique sur l'économie d'Orléans;

« Attendu que le besoin en infrastructure routière est requis pour les résidents qui devront traverser notre ville pour se rendre à leur travail;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à la province de l'Ontario et au ministère des Transports de faire leur part pour mettre fin à cette étude environnementale; et, bien entendu, que les améliorations aux infrastructures routières en cours sur les autoroutes 174 et 417 bénéficient Orléans et ses environs; et, bien entendu, que la province de l'Ontario supporte la ville d'Ottawa dans ses démarches pour convaincre le gouvernement fédéral de financer le prolongement du train léger du chemin Blair au chemin Trim, lequel est encore plus nécessaire depuis le déplacement des 15 000 emplois accessibles aux résidents d'Orléans vers l'extrême ouest;

« Nous, soussignés, supportons cette pétition et apposons nos noms ci-dessous. »

Moi, je supporte la pétition. J'ai signé et je vous l'envoie avec Georgia. Merci, monsieur le Président.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt;

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and Oak Ridges moraine;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier government to plan, protect and enforce ... effective policies governing the application and permitting process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries;

"Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Minister of the Environment initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent

contamination of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt."

As I am in complete agreement, I have affixed my signature to this to give it to page Safa.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I sign this in the name of the over 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized because of this bill.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health has changed the availability of epidural injections for quality pain control for people with pain from whenever required by the physician prescribing it, to only being allowed to have 12 epidural injections" over "12 months, amounting to one every four weeks to the date of the previous injection, regardless of the level of people's pain requiring the injection and without regard for the quality of the people's lives who are living with this pain;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario...

"To return the time frame for epidural injections for pain control being administered by the pain specialist physician to the previous allowance of being able to receive these injections when required by the attending physician."

I affix my signature to these petitions.

1350

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174-417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

"Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

I agree with this petition, sign it and will send it up with Katie.

ONTARIO HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has announced plans to change a number of Ontario health insurance plan (OHIP) services; and

"Whereas these changes are the result of a provincial debt crisis created by nine years of out-of-control government spending; and

"Whereas these changes will affect the ophthalmology, cardiology and radiology services that are currently crucial to many Ontarians' quality of life;

"We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government release its patient health impact study on the recently announced Ontario health insurance plan changes, or, if such a study has not been conducted, that one is immediately undertaken and made public."

I affix my signature to this.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Cambridge has filed notice of his intent to raise a point of privilege. I'm prepared to recognize him now to state his point. The member for Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of privilege after providing you with the notice required under the standing orders. This point of privilege relates to events that occurred during the estimates committee over the past number of months. I wish to provide a synthesis of those events and cite some precedents, which I hope that you consider in deliberating over this matter.

On Wednesday, May 16, 2012, the Standing Committee on Estimates passed a motion that required the Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to provide the committee with documents relating to the Oakville and Mississauga power plants.

The Minister of Energy responded to the committee on May 30, 2012, and stated, "In light of the confidential, privileged and highly commercially sensitive nature of these issues, it would not be appropriate for my office or the ministry to disclose information that would prejudice these ongoing negotiations and litigation." The Ontario Power Authority provided similar reasoning in the response, which was simply one letter—one letter from the minister and one letter from the Ontario Power Authority with respect to documents that we were requesting from that committee.

As a result of the minister's refusal to deal with this matter at the Standing Committee on Estimates, the committee has just sent a report to the House advising the Speaker that a possible contempt of the Legislature has occurred.

On July 11, 2012, the minister did provide some documents to the committee. However, the documents provided were far from complete. The energy minister stated in a letter attached to the documents that, "Certain information remains subject to ... privilege" and that it has not been included. The Minister of Energy also failed to provide any documents pertaining to the Oakville power plant, as requested by the committee on May 16, 2012, with a deadline of a fortnight from that date.

Parliamentary authority is unanimous in acknowledging that the Legislature has an undoubted right to obtain information. Certainly, Speaker Milliken suggested that when he ruled on the Afghan detainee issue. Let's cite some of those authorities.

Bourinot's Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada states, "The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public questions is undoubted, and the circumstances must be exceptional, and the reasons very cogent, when it cannot be at once laid before the Houses."

O'Brien and Bosc provide a list of instances that amount to contempt in the Legislature, and they include in that list, "without reasonable excuse, refusing to answer a question or provide information or produce papers formally required by the House or a committee." The simple point here, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister hasn't provided the documents that we were requesting, which is the reason why I'm standing here today.

Look at standing order 110(b), which states that "each committee shall have power to send for persons, papers

and things.” This is one of the rights that we have as legislators in this assembly.

On this point, O'Brien and Bosc state that, “The power to send for persons, papers and records has been delegated by the House of Commons to its committees in the standing orders. It is well established that Parliament has the right to order any and all documents to be laid before it which it believes are necessary for its information.”

They further state that, “The standing orders do not delimit the power to order the production of papers and records. The result is a broad, absolute power that on the surface appears to be without restriction. There is no limit on the type of papers likely to be requested; the only prerequisite is that the papers exist—in hard copy or electronic format—and that they are located in Canada.”

O'Brien and Bosc illustrate the House's right to obtain documents by citing a report from the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections in 1991. The committee concluded that, “It is well established that Parliament has the right to order any and all documents to be laid before it which it believes are necessary for its information.... The power to call for persons, papers and records is absolute, but it is seldom exercised without consideration of the public interest.”

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the public interest in this case rests upon the foundations of accountability and transparency, which is our role as members of the committee and members of this Legislature: to hold the government to account. We must preserve that right to accountability and transparency so we can hold the government accountable.

In 2011, we have an instance in the House of Commons in Ottawa. It was the finance committee, which had requested documents from the government regarding the cost of some of the bills before the House. The government refused to table all the documents and cited cabinet confidence. The committee sent a report to the House, and MP Scott Brison rose on a point of privilege, much like I'm doing today. The Speaker ruled that the government's failure to produce the documents constituted a *prima facie* breach of the House's privilege. In his ruling, Speaker Milliken of the House of Commons the Honourable Peter Milliken said that “The standing orders state that standing committees have the power to order the production of papers and records, another privilege rooted in the Constitution that is delegated by the House.

“Thus, the power of committees of the House to order papers is indistinguishable from that of the House.”

What is the purpose of the estimates committee? The mandate of the committee is to investigate and to find out, through estimates, what is happening in government ministries. To achieve this goal, the committee should not be obstructed from receiving documents that it orders. The documents were ordered by the committee from the Minister of Energy to help get to the bottom of potential pitfalls with the estimates in the Ministry of Energy. Each year, the government introduces the estimates for the year. When hundreds of millions of dollars

have not been accounted for in those estimates, the committee has the right to know how this will affect the estimates being tabled in the House, which is the reason why we requested those documents.

Another federal example, one that has received quite a lot of media attention, is the Afghan detainee issue in the federal House of Commons. The government refused to provide the documents, citing reasons of national security. MP Derek Lee rose on a point of privilege and charged that the government's refusal to provide documents constituted a breach of privilege, and Speaker Milliken ruled that a breach of privilege did, in fact, occur. He stated in that judgment that “procedural authorities are categorical in repeatedly asserting the powers of the House in ordering the production of documents. No exceptions are made for any category of government documents, even those related to national security.”

His finding of a *prima facie* breach of privilege ultimately came down to the Legislature's ability to request documents to hold the government to account.

1400

Speaker Milliken also discussed, in his Afghan detainee ruling, that the House has a right to the documents that they request and that “the government understands the House's undoubted role as the ‘grand inquest of the nation’ and its need for complete and accurate information in order to fulfill its duty of holding the government to account.”

He further stated that, “In a system of responsible government, the fundamental right of the House of Commons to hold the government to account for its actions is an indisputable privilege and in fact an obligation. In this case, the House of Commons' efforts to hold the government to account have been unduly frustrated by the government itself.” That, Mr. Speaker, is again something that we're seeing in this case.

Speaker Milliken further discusses in the Afghan detainee ruling that there “is no doubt that an order to produce documents is not being fully complied with, and this is a serious matter that goes to the heart of the House's undoubted role in holding the government to account.”

Mr. Speaker, the role of the opposition parties is to hold the government accountable, and it is clear that the minister and the ministry's failure to provide the requested documents has obstructed a standing committee of this Legislature.

Speaker Milliken ruled in the Afghan detainee case that there “is a difference between the practice of the House which allows a minister, on the sole basis of his or her judgment, to refrain from tabling a cited document for reasons of confidentiality and national security and an order, duly adopted by the House following notice and debate, requiring the tabling of documents.” Mr. Speaker, this is the exact point that we're making here today: that we require these documents to be able to understand what's going on on the government side.

Further, in his ruling on the Afghan detainee issue, Speaker Milliken said that “the authorities I have cited

are unanimous in the view of the House's privilege to ask for the production of papers, and many go on to explain that accommodations are made between those seeking information and those in possession of it to ensure that arrangements are made in the best interests of the public they both serve."

There are a number of different avenues and forms in which we could see these documents, Mr. Speaker. The reasons that have been laid before us are simply, in our opinion, subject to question.

The committee understands that the government has a job to do. However, the opposition's job is to hold the government to account, and the government's refusal to provide the documents that the committee requested is blocking us from our undoubted role as members of the opposition.

The two cases that I've highlighted demonstrate that precedents exist regarding the issue before us. In both scenarios, the federal minister's failure to provide complete documents exemplified a *prima facie* contempt of Parliament.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, my point of privilege is based upon the simple fact that members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should have the same access to documents that it requests as members of the House of Commons have in Ottawa.

The government has laid out a number of reasons for not wishing to release documents. I wish to argue that the excuses being used by the government to withhold information from the committee are no more severe than matters of national security. If we accept the government's central arguments against the release of these documents, namely the sub judice argument, the commercially sensitive argument and the solicitor-client privilege argument, the government could use such arguments to restrict virtually all information from the Legislature's committees. This would be a precedent that would run against the spirit of openness, accountability and transparency in our democratic institutions.

I respectfully request that you examine this summary, the authorities I have cited and the precedents that speak to the issue at hand. At the heart of this point of privilege is a desire to see our committees do the job that members of this House expect and that all Ontarians would appreciate. I hope that you would deliberate on this matter and rule whether the minister's reluctance to divulge all of the documents does in fact constitute a *prima facie* breach of the House's privilege and contempt of this Legislature. I thank you for looking into this matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Response? The government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on this point of privilege. I think members would recognize that my colleague from Cambridge has raised a very complex issue. Mr. Speaker, at the outset, although I'm prepared to submit some oral arguments today, I would also ask your permission that we be allowed to provide and file materials with the Speaker—a written submission, which, of course, as is

tradition, we would provide to the opposition parties as well. We're prepared to do that forthwith.

Mr. Speaker, I think we have to begin with the facts of the case, a summary of the case that's under discussion right now. Between May 9 and July 11, the Minister of Energy appeared before the Standing Committee on Estimates for the purpose of answering questions regarding the 2012-13 estimates for the Ministry of Energy. While the minister answered questions relating to a number of issues, the committee members from the official opposition spent considerable time asking the minister questions relating to the two gas plants which were to have been built in Oakville and Mississauga respectively. As I'm sure members of this House are aware, the OPA contracted to have these two facilities built to meet energy demands at the time.

In the case of the Oakville facility, the OPA contracted with TransCanada Energy in September 2009 to design, build and operate, over a 20-year term, a 900-megawatt natural-gas-fired electricity generating station. In October 2010, the government determined that it no longer required a facility in Oakville to meet energy demands, and announced that the project would not proceed. While no formal litigation resulted from the government's decision, the government and TransCanada have been engaged in formal arbitration and confidential settlement discussions since the decision was made not to proceed with the facility. The matter remains outstanding.

In the case of the Mississauga facility, in April 2005 the OPA contracted with Greenfield South Power Corp., known as Greenfield, to develop and operate a 300-megawatt natural-gas-fired electricity generating station in Mississauga. During the fall 2011 general election campaign, the Ontario Liberal Party made a commitment in response to mounting community opposition that, if re-elected, the government would relocate the Mississauga facility to another location. I would note, Mr. Speaker, that the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party and the Ontario New Democratic Party made the same commitment during the course of the campaign. Shortly after being re-elected, the government announced its intention to relocate the Mississauga facility. The government's decision to relocate the Mississauga facility caused the commencement of civil proceedings in both the province of Ontario and the state of New York. These lawsuits, as well as confidential settlement negotiations, were ongoing at the time the Minister of Energy appeared before the Standing Committee on Estimates.

While before the committee, the Minister of Energy was placed in a difficult position. He was repeatedly asked to answer questions relating to the Oakville and Mississauga facilities. The overwhelming majority of the questions related specifically to the ongoing outstanding legal proceedings and confidential negotiations. The Minister of Energy attempted to strike an effective balance between the committee's authority to ask those questions and the need to protect the public interest in the midst of highly sensitive commercial negotiations and litigation.

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think members will want to hear this next section; it's very important.

The Chair recognized the precarious situation of the Minister of Energy and repeatedly ruled that while committee members were permitted to ask such questions, the minister was able to exercise his discretion and respond to such questions in a manner that protected the interests of the province.

On May 16, the member from Cambridge moved a motion pursuant to standing order 110(b) directing the minister, the Ministry of Energy and the OPA to produce, within two weeks, all correspondence between September 1, 2010, and December 31, 2011, relating to the decision not to proceed with the construction of the Oakville facility, and all correspondence between August 1, 2011, and December 31, 2011, relating to the relocation of the Mississauga facility. The member from Windsor West challenged whether the motion was in order. While the Chair ruled the motion was in order, the Chair also stated the following—Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote; it's very important—"Notwithstanding the learned position put forward by Ms. Piruzza, there was one point in which she stated that the minister, of course, has every right to decline. I think that that is perhaps the saving grace to allowing this to proceed.

1410

"I would have to rule, in my opinion, that this motion is in order because the committee has the right to ask for documentation, as Mr. Leone has pointed out in his counter-argument. They have the right to ask for the documentation." This is very important, the next phrase, Mr. Speaker: "The minister has the right to decline either giving that documentation or giving voice to that documentation during his answering of the questions."

The Chair went on: "I would advise that I'm going to allow the motion to proceed, but I would also advise—and I think the minister, being a lawyer himself, knows full well that he may choose to answer the question in such a way as not to prejudice the province in any way, and I would expect him to do so. That would be my ruling."

That's Hansard, May 16, 2012, page E-39.

The minister relied on the Chair's repeated statements and rulings that the minister was permitted to respond to questions and document requests from committee members in a manner that protected the interests of the province.

As a result, the minister wrote to the committee on May 30 and advised the committee that he was exercising his discretion and would not be able to produce the requested documentation as they were confidential, subject to solicitor-client privilege or litigation privilege, or highly commercially sensitive.

The committee appeared to accept the minister's response. It was open to the committee to dismiss the issues raised by the minister and demand production of the documents by passing a second motion to this effect. The committee did not do this. Rather, the committee simply resumed its questioning of the Minister of Energy.

On June 5, the member from Cambridge moved a motion to report to the House the minister's failure to produce all responsive records pursuant to the motion of May 16, and ask the House to order the minister to produce the previously requested records, failing which the motion asked that the minister be found in contempt of Parliament.

The member from Cambridge's June 5 motion was inaccurate in a number of respects. Most significantly, the motion did not accurately reflect the repeated advice and rulings of the Chair that the minister was permitted to decline to answer questions or to produce documentation relating to the Oakville and Mississauga facilities if he felt that was necessary.

On July 10, the minister announced that the OPA had reached an agreement with Greenfield to relocate the Mississauga facility and that the government had accepted the OPA's recommendation to relocate the Mississauga facility to the Lambton station in Sarnia. In addition, the minister announced that it had settled the related civil proceedings in the state of New York.

The following day, on July 11, the minister wrote to the committee to advise the committee of the OPA's settlement of all outstanding matters relating to the Mississauga facility. The minister provided the committee with settlement details, including the total relocation costs. The legal matters relating to the Mississauga gas plant having been settled, the minister advised the committee that he had requested his ministry to provide the committee with all correspondence relating to the Mississauga facility that was responsive to the motion of May 16, except for records that are subject to solicitor-client privilege.

Here again, it was open to the committee to consider the minister's request and either accept the claim of privilege or confirm its order for the production of the documents, notwithstanding the claim of privilege. The committee did not respond in any way to the minister's July 11 letter and request that the committee continue to respect solicitor-client privilege. Rather, the committee simply passed the motion of June 5, thereby referring the matter to the House and giving rise to this point of privilege.

While, Mr. Speaker, there is little doubt that a legislative committee has absolute authority to compel the production of records, a legislative committee has an associated responsibility to ensure that it is clear and unequivocal when a responding party seeks, in good faith, to safeguard documents that are highly sensitive, confidential or subject to solicitor-client privilege.

The minister was placed in a situation where he was being asked to fulfil competing obligations. On the one hand, the committee had absolute authority to and did ask the minister to produce thousands of pages of highly sensitive confidential and solicitor-client privileged documents. On the other hand, the minister had an obligation to protect those same documents, documents which were highly sensitive, the vast majority of which were protected by solicitor-client privilege.

Mr. Speaker, solicitor-client privilege is fundamental to the Canadian legal system and to the administration of justice. The importance of solicitor-client privilege has been repeatedly recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada. As such, the minister sought to achieve an effective balance between the authority of the committee, the need to protect the public interest in the midst of highly sensitive commercial negotiations and litigation, and the need to respect solicitor-client privilege. The evidentiary record confirms this.

This is not—and I stress that—a case where a minister of the crown was simply refusing to comply with an order of the committee. The minister was repeatedly advised by the Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates that he was permitted to respond to questions as well as requests for documents in a manner which protected the interests of the province. In fact, the Chair specifically advised that he expected the minister to respond in this manner.

Relying on statements and rulings of the Chair, the minister reviewed the documentation requested by the committee and determined that it was confidential, subject to solicitor-client privilege or litigation privilege or was highly commercially sensitive. The minister then exercised his discretion—discretion that he was told by the Chair that he had—and advised the committee that he was unable to produce the requested documentation. The committee accepted the minister's position and resumed its questioning of the minister.

Despite having taken no action to inform the minister that the committee was not satisfied with his response, the member from Cambridge moved a motion on June 5 to refer the matter to the House.

On July 11, the minister again wrote to the committee to advise that the legal matters relating to the Mississauga facility had been resolved, and therefore he was able to release documents relating to this facility that were not subject to solicitor-client privilege. The minister asked the committee to continue to respect solicitor-client privilege. The committee did not respond in any way to the minister's July 11 letter and request that the committee continue to respect solicitor-client privilege. Rather, the committee passed a motion on June 5, thereby referring the matter to the House and giving rise to this point of privilege.

Simply stated, there has been no clear and unequivocal request by the committee for documents. The committee has requested documents and the minister has responded to the committee's request by raising significant concerns with this request. It was open to the committee to pass a second motion compelling production of the documents, notwithstanding the minister's concerns regarding confidentiality, solicitor-client privilege and the best interests of the province. The committee did not do this; the committee did nothing.

The issues raised by the member in his point of privilege are matters of parliamentary procedure, not matters of parliamentary privilege. The committee report giving rise to this point of privilege was not only premature

from a procedural standpoint but has resulted in gross unfairness to a minister who has attempted at all times to respond in good faith to a legislative committee's request for the production of highly sensitive, confidential and privileged records.

When a minister responds to a request for the production of records by raising flags in an effort to protect the public interest and long-standing constitutional principles, the committee has a responsibility to respond by clearly articulating its will. In this matter, the committee has failed to do so. The government takes the position that a breach of privilege cannot arise in the circumstances giving rise to the member from Cambridge's point of privilege, and the Speaker should therefore find that this matter does not give rise to a *prima facie* breach of privilege. The government respectfully submits that in the absence of a clear and unequivocal order from the House or the committee for the minister to produce all records that are responsive to the motion of May 16 despite the public policy and legal considerations that have been raised by the minister, the Speaker should find that no *prima facie* case of privilege has been made out. The point of privilege is premature. The committee has not followed the proper procedural steps.

Mr. Speaker, I close by saying that in the alternative, should you find that a question of privilege does indeed arise in this matter, the government requests that the Speaker consider the steps taken by Speaker Milliken in his 2010 ruling regarding Afghan detainees and defer any further steps in this matter to allow the House leaders an opportunity to resolve this issue in a way that strikes an effective balance between the public policy considerations that have been raised by the minister and the committee's desire to receive documentation relating to the Oakville and Mississauga facilities.

Once again, despite the length of the presentation I put forward today, I do feel there are a number of very complex issues that need to be more fully addressed. I close with the same request in the beginning: that we be allowed to make a written submission forthwith to you to complement what I've said today in my oral submission. Thank you.

1420

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker. I can promise you I will not quote out of Bosc; I will not quote out of Beauchesne's. It has all been done. I want to make a couple of points to tie this all together.

First of all, I appreciate the point that was raised by Mr. Leone. I think he makes a good argument procedurally in regard to what the precedents say and what the standing orders say our rights are as members, but more important, what the rights of the committee are.

Let's review why we're here. In the last election, the government decided to reverse itself on a major policy decision. They, unlike New Democrats, decided to go ahead and to build gas plants in those communities and

decided, in the middle of the election, because seats were in danger, that they were going to reverse that policy decision, the result of that costing taxpayers in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Let's be clear: Liberals wanted to build gas plants. New Democrats didn't want to build gas plants in those communities. We did not have the same policy. So when I hear the government House leader get up and say that we agree—we would never have put them there in the first place, because we thought there was too much community opposition to those projects to start with and that you should move them into communities that are willing, not unwilling communities. I just want to be clear.

Number 2: We then have the general election. As a result of the general election, the government decides to go forward with their announcement as made during the election, which is to cancel those particular projects. All right, the government made the decision; the cabinet made that decision. So from that, a whole bunch of discussions took place with the various players in order to figure out, how much is it going to cost the taxpayers to get out of this mess? What does that do? It affects the expenditures of the province of Ontario, hence the estimates process.

The government of Ontario had to come up with that money somewhere. They didn't pull it out of the air. The \$180 million—or the \$186 million I think is what the number is—that so far has been spent just on the Oakville plant, and God knows how much on the Mississauga one that's coming up—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —or the other way around, for another couple of hundred million dollars—the government has got to find that money somewhere. They can't just pull the number out of the air and say that magically the money is going to appear in the right account to cover the costs. They have to pull it out of some appropriation somewhere.

Guess what, Mr. Speaker? We all know there's a process in the budget called estimates, and this is a very powerful role that the committee has and a very important one. The estimates committee has the ability to review the expenditures of the government of Ontario. That means to say that the estimates committee, when a particular ministry comes forward, such as the Ministry of Energy, can say, "All right, where are you spending your money? How have you spent that money? Does it make any sense?" It can ask all of the questions in regard to what the function of the spending of the money was. To be able to get the answers behind all of that, the committee had to ask for certain papers, because what's clear is that the committee is in the dark, the public is in the dark and this Legislature is in the dark when it comes to all of the details about how they came up to the \$186 million, what the conditions were that led to that particular negotiation and what all the numbers are about.

The committee did what any good committee should do. They said, "We want to find out why it is and how it

is and how it took place—and all of the five Ws." I forget what they all are now, which is kind of sad, because it would have been so much fun.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Who, what, when, where and how. W5 used to do that. I used to be so good at it.

But the point is, the committee did what a good committee should do and wanted to get all the information in order to take a look at and report back, by way of its votes to the House, what the expenditures of the government were when it came to Ministry of Energy. That's why they asked for the documents.

I'm not going to go through, reading all of the standing orders and precedents, but it's clear that the committee has the right—first of all, the House has the right—to ask for any witness or any document that they choose to do their job. In our standing orders, we have given the rights from the House directly to the committee. It's not as if the committee sort of did this on their own. Our standing orders contemplate, as they do in Ottawa, that the committees have the same right to call witnesses and to ask for documents and papers to appear so that the committee can do its work. It's something we conferred by way of the standing orders. This is not as if the committee decided on some whim to do this. It's not as if they were overreaching their authority. The House gave that right to the committees, and it has been that way for many a year, so the committee has requested that information. The first point I want to make is, the committee was perfectly within its right to ask for that information.

I was listening to the government House leader go on to talk about how it was that the Chair had made some rulings that, in fact, said that the minister didn't have to provide that information. That's not what the Chair said. Come on. That was a stretch, my friend, as my good friend Mr. Kormos would say. I think I had the inflections right there.

What the Chair said was that a member can ask a question to a witness, but if the person chooses not to answer, that's quite another thing. That's essentially what the Chair was saying.

Now, if we as committee members are unhappy with the information that is being withheld by a witness, or by a minister in this case, or by documents not being provided, the standing orders allow the committee to deal with that. So the only thing that the Chair was saying, Speaker—and this is important because you have to put this in the context of what it is. The Chair was stating the obvious: If a minister comes before the committee and decides he doesn't want to give a particular answer, well, you know, the minister will do what the minister's going to do. But that does not trump the right of the committee.

If the committee is prepared to accept the bad answer or the no answer from the minister, as has happened before, that's the committee's choice. But if the committee decides—and this is what's happened here—that in fact that is not acceptable and that we need this information and there has to be a clear accounting of

what's happening, the right of the minister to refuse to answer doesn't trump the right of the committee. Therefore, the committee did what I think essentially is correct. They said, "All right. We request that the minister provide this information," and did so by way of a motion.

The motion is now before the House and now allows you, as the Speaker, to make that particular decision. I just want to say that it is fairly clear in the standing orders and the precedents that the committee has this right.

Now, my good friend Mr. Leone raises the point in regard to the Afghan situation. The minister, through the House leader, argues this is all about solicitor-client privilege. Well, imagine if that was the case. Imagine if you could hide behind solicitor-client privilege every time something came up in the House or anything happened in the public. The minister would be able to hide behind that each and every chance. The rights of this Legislature are as the rights of the courts: Essentially, because a lawyer goes to court and argues a case on behalf of a client doesn't allow them to withhold evidence. If evidence is withheld, what happens? You're held in contempt of the court. And there's no difference when it comes to the Legislature or a committee. Solicitor-client privilege is not about withholding evidence. It never has been. That's not what it's all about. I'm not going to get into the definition of it, but you understand as lawyers, those of you who have that affliction, what solicitor-client privilege is. But I just say, if a person went to court as a solicitor and said, "I'm not going to provide evidence," or "I'm not going to provide information," or "I'm not going to provide documentation because I want to hide behind solicitor-client privilege," I think there'd be a pretty good case for contempt on the part of the judge and the jury against that particular solicitor.

So my point is, yes, I understand that there are certain rights that are afforded solicitors when it comes to going to court, but this is not a case of solicitor-client privilege. In fact, most of this is not even before the courts, so how can you even argue that? At this point, there's no lawsuit in regard to one of those particular dealings. So there's that to be said.

The other thing I just want to say very quickly—and I made the point here. Oh, yes, I wanted to get into the sub judge rule issue. That was the only other thing I wanted to get into. The term "sub judge" literally means under judicial consideration, and the rule governs what public statements can be made about ongoing legal proceedings before the courts. The rule applies where court proceedings are ongoing and through all stages of appeal until the matter is completed. However, as all the members know, the issue of the Oakville gas plant is not even before the courts, as I said earlier. And even if it was, sub judge is trumped by the parliamentary supremacy. So the argument that the government doesn't have to provide those documents by hiding behind the sub judge rule doesn't stand because at the end the Parliament has a

particular right invoked by way of our right as parliamentarians, both in Ottawa and in the provinces, to be able to do our job. And to do our job means to say we need to be provided with the documents. And in this particular case, I believe there's a strong case to say that the minister is in contempt because he's withholding information that this committee needs in order to do its work.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule in favour of this particular request that he be found in contempt, and I would argue that the arguments have been well made. Thank you.

1430

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'll be brief, but I do want to acknowledge the insights offered by my colleague from Timmins–James Bay.

It is a pleasure to stand and debate in support of allowing my colleague's point of privilege. The member from Cambridge is not only a caucus colleague, but I sit with him in the estimates committee as well.

It's also important to keep in mind that former Speaker of the House of Commons Peter Milliken has spoken on this subject before. I think it's a bit rich for the minister's office to withhold information about a project being financed by the Ontario taxpayers on the basis of public interest when Speaker Milliken ruled in favour of a point of privilege during a debate about the war in Afghanistan.

There have been a number of issues uncovered in committee, issues that have a deep and abiding relevance to the families of Ontario. It's our job to scrutinize as deeply as possible the spending habits of this government, which have been suspect, in my opinion.

The member from Cambridge has already cited O'Brien and Bosc and their argument that the ability to call for documents is of cornerstone importance to the open and accountable operation of this Legislature. Indeed, the former House of Commons Speaker spoke on the need for full and complete information, even in the case of the Afghan detainees. I cannot fathom a situation in which withholding information on this government's spending habits could be of more public importance than matters relating to Canadian involvement in the Afghan war.

Any member of this House who has sat in committee understands the process of questioning a minister and the effort sometimes required to get to the bottom of that question. These procedural rules are at our disposal to avoid, as much as possible, confusion about our rights as parliamentarians and the service we owe our constituents.

Therefore, Speaker, I ask that you consider the following point of privilege before the House and allow the members of the estimates committee to continue the work we were sent here to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On that same point of privilege raised by my colleague from Cambridge, I listened to all

of the addresses, and I want to particularly focus on the one of the government House leader at this point. I heard it said repeatedly about the minister retaining the right to act in the public interest. Speaker, I would contend that the minister does not have the right to act in the public interest; he has the absolute responsibility to act in the public interest. What seems to be a question here is, what is the public's interest?

The very crux of the matter of what the committee was trying to get at was all of the information and the costs associated with the cancellation of the gas plants, particularly the one in Mississauga, which we know there were some figures released on, but also in Oakville—to get all of the documentation associated with those decisions and the cost that the public would be left to bear.

The government House leader talks about the minister's right to refuse to provide information in the public interest. On whose decision, at whose consideration, at whose determination were those actions in the public interest?

I would contend that it did not have to be released to the Toronto Star—not to pick on the Toronto Star—but the members of that committee have an absolute right to know the answers to those questions. That could have been done in an in-camera session, and then they could have, on an all-party basis, decided what was in the public's interest, because the public's interest should be determined by the public and at least a representative group of the public itself. The minister is not acting in the public's interest when he determines that he should not answer that question in the public's interest; he is acting in the Liberal Party of Ontario's interests, because they're the ones who made the decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant.

I would contend that the point of privilege is absolutely within the bounds of the rights of the committee to ask for, and I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that in the public interest, you would rule in favour of the point of privilege put forth by the member from Cambridge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We've been talking for about 15 minutes, and there are a couple of things that have stood out so far today. The first one is the revelation, from the House leader, that Mississauga was "cancelled because of capacity." He should be speaking with his fellow ministers because, in the last couple of months, we have learned from his own ministers that it was cancelled for political opportunity. That has come out time and time again in the estimates committee. So I would hope that he would look into that and correct that.

Secondly, to the very point, we're here talking about our struggle to get information from this government. In the presentation by the House leader, he spoke at length about Mississauga, Mississauga, Mississauga, Mississauga. But I ask: What about the documents for Oakville? None of those documents have been presented, yet they were equally asked for at the estimates committee. This goes to the very point. His own speech today

highlights our great concern that we are not receiving the information that we've been asking for. They are defying the committee's motion.

Speaker, I ask, I urge, that you join us in pushing for the information that we've asked for, been promised and have yet to see delivered.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to add a few comments. First, I want to commend the member for Cambridge for bringing forward this matter, and also all the work of the committee.

I want to make sure I put a few comments on the record in response to the government House leader's argument about solicitor-client privilege, this whole issue of sub judice and the whole commercially sensitive issue of making that an acceptable reason for a minister to withhold documents from a committee of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Rather than being accommodating, I think there are many of us who feel that the minister took the path of least resistance.

I appreciate the fact that the member for Cambridge has quoted Speaker Milliken when it comes to the Afghan detainee case. The quote that I would like to put on the record is part of his ruling: "There is a difference between the practice of the House which allows a minister, on the sole basis of his or her judgment, to refrain from tabling a cited document for reasons of confidentiality and national security, and an order, duly adopted by the House following notice and debate, requiring the tabling of documents." It's important to note that the latter is in hand in this case.

Parliamentary authority is very clear when dealing with sub judice convention. When determining this, the Speaker decides whether the reasons for refusing to table the document are reasonable, sufficient and exceptional.

Sir John George Bourinot states that, "It must be remembered that under all circumstances it is for the House to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient."

I know that there have been a number of quotations, but when you look at O'Brien and Bosc and the first report of the Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members, it "recommended that the imposition of the convention should be done with discretion and, when there was any doubt in the mind of the Chair, a presumption should exist in favour of allowing debate and against the application of the convention. Since the presentation of the report, Speakers have followed these guidelines...."

1440

Jeanne Sauvé, former Speaker of the House of Commons, ruled that when considering a *prima facie* matter of privilege, "The House has never allowed the sub judice convention to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest or to the effective operation of the House and its members."

In terms of the issue of being commercially sensitive, if the litigation on the Mississauga and Oakville power

plants is so commercially sensitive, why did the media have documents from court that show that the Ontario Power Authority tried to settle with EIG management, LLC for \$83 million? If those documents were available to the public, why wouldn't the minister and the Ontario Power Authority, at the very minimum, provide that same information to the committee? This article demonstrates that the minister's claim that he cannot provide the committee with documents is absolutely without merit.

Speaker, I have to ask you, are these excuses being used by the government to withhold information from the committee more severe than matters of public security? I believe, all members of this House believe, that they are not. If we accept these excuses, my opinion is that the government would use such arguments in the future to restrict virtually all information that committees would want to provide. So I ask you, Speaker, to support the member for Cambridge.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity, and all members, for providing their comments this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very brief with my comments. I just want to reply to a couple of the statements made by the government House leader. It was of course my duty over those many months to chair that particular committee. I just want the record to be very clear that in my rulings, they were always to the effect that the committee had an unabridged and total right to ask for documentation, and I ruled that on many occasions. In fact, there were some 20 or 25 individual rulings that I had to break in a tied 4-4 vote, and it was a very difficult time. I think if the Speaker will look at the entire record, you will see how I attempted, I think very successfully, to be an unbiased Chair, giving both sides an equal opportunity.

The second thing I want to make very clear is that at the end of the procedure—and there were some seven hours of debate just on the letter that Mr. Leone had submitted; there were seven hours of full debate on the contents, with amendments made and everything else. But at the end, there were government members who appeared not to be satisfied with the motion. Again, it was on a 4-4 vote, and I was required to vote to break the tie. I gave them an opportunity—and you will find it in the record—to submit a minority report should they wish to do so. That opportunity was given. Letters were sent both by me and by the clerk of the committee to the government side when the minority report was not forthcoming, and it is my understanding that one was never submitted. I think that needs to be part of the record as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. I just want to thank Mr. Leone for filing his point of privilege in writing, and I want to thank Mr. Milloy, Mr. Bisson, Mr. Nicholls, Mr. Yakabuski, Mr. Clark and Mr. Prue for their input on this particular issue. I will reserve my decision and report back to the House at a later date.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT AND CREATING JOBS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 VISANT À ATTIRER LES INVESTISSEMENTS ET À CRÉER DES EMPLOIS

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 11, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act respecting the continuation and establishment of development funds in order to promote regional economic development in eastern and southwestern Ontario / Projet de loi 11, Loi concernant la prorogation et la création de fonds de développement pour promouvoir le développement économique régional dans l'Est et le Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): When Bill 11 was last before the House, the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound had completed his remarks but questions and comments still needed to be done. We will therefore proceed to questions and comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to put on the record that New Democrats, on this particular bill on the southwest economic development fund, had at the very beginning indicated our support. Not only that, we had put forward some amendments growing from the experience of what we learned in northern Ontario with the northern Ontario heritage fund.

The government had decided it wanted to create a slush fund originally, and they were going to give the minister the sole right to decide where the money was going to be spent, where the press events were going to take place and who was going to be at the press event—him and his staff, and maybe some of the Liberal members. We thought that was a bad idea.

We thought the model followed by the northern Ontario heritage fund was a good one. It says that a committee made up of people from the region will look at the applications. They will decide who is going to get the money, how and all the conditions, and then it's up to a non-partisan process to announce the money. It works extremely well in northern Ontario. It's something that all three parties have gotten behind, and New Democrats, through our critic, put forward amendments that allowed that to happen.

The bill went to committee. There were short hearings. We got the amendments that we wanted as New Democrats and we were looking forward to the bill passing last spring. For whatever reason, the government decided it was more important to advance their own political gain and make it look as if the opposition was holding this up than it was to actually get the bill passed.

I'm the NDP House leader. Imagine my surprise when we're negotiating what's called a programming motion last spring and at the end of the negotiations, I say, "Listen, we're willing to allow you to pass Bill 11 on the nod." What did government say? "No." It was the

government that said no; it wasn't the opposition that was trying to hold it up, from the New Democratic side of the House. I can't speak for the Tories because at that point, they were ringing bells and they weren't allowing anything to happen through the House at the time, but I can tell you we had offered it up as part of the programming motion, and the government is the one that said no.

This was clearly politics as usual—the Liberals doing what's good for the Liberal policy, not necessarily what's good for southwestern and southeastern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very happy to be able to make some comments on this legislation because, as many of you will know—and many of you were there. I was just recently at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario annual conference, the AMO conference in Ottawa. This is an issue that we actually heard a lot about. I don't know if many of you were in deputations where members of councils who are from eastern Ontario and from southwestern Ontario came and spoke about the importance of this legislation and the development fund, whether it's the southwestern Ontario development fund or the eastern Ontario development fund.

I know, for example, the eastern Ontario development fund—113 projects approved out of 132 applications; only two of the 113 projects have not been successful, only one of which, having received funds—a project success rate of 98%. There was \$53.5 million leveraged to 12,000 jobs. I think that money leveraged \$493 million in investments.

The issue here is that this is a very important piece of legislation. It's an important fund. It's being called for by municipal politicians and communities alike. We are very eager to move this ahead, contrary to what the member of the third party said.

I guess what's confounding to me is that the Conservatives are still blocking this legislation. As recently as today, Monday, August 27, what's reported by Gillian Wheatley in the London Free Press is that the "Provincial Tories ... intend to yank the hope out from under Liberals ... in a planned mass ... vote" against the bill, and that's Bill 11. That \$80-million regional job fund will once again attempt to be blocked by the Conservatives. My hope is that we'll be able to get it through, but I can't believe that they would continue to block it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Toby Barrett: A comment on Bill 11 and these funds: Anyone who's been door-knocking in Kitchener-Waterloo—I have noticed the Liberal brochures touting the southwestern economic development fund essentially being used to buy votes from the people in Kitchener-Waterloo with their own money. We made it very clear last year that PCs are voting against what appears to be very clearly a wedge issue. When you're staring down the barrel of a \$411.4-billion debt, when you're digging a hole that deep, it's important that you stop digging. Even

if it was a good program, and it's regardless of whether it's a good program or a bad program, the money is not there. You cannot suck this kind of money out of the taxpayer.

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You know, very clearly you can judge future behaviour by past behaviour. And again, figures that have come in on the eastern Ontario development fund rewarded business in Liberal ridings at the rate of two times that of PC ridings. Again, this is significant before these by-elections: 80% of taxpayer dollars from the eastern Ontario fund went to Liberal ridings. Most of the dollars in the eastern Ontario economic development fund went, by and large, to Liberal cabinet minister ridings. That's not only corporate welfare slush, that is also a Liberal slush fund.

The announcement down our way was made in London. I just heard you mention London, Minister. We know the finance minister has shovelled an awful lot of money into his hometown in Windsor. We look at this fund with a very jaundiced eye. We're not going to reverse our position on this vote. We're not going to vote in favour of this fund.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments? The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been many, many months since the original speech was made from the honourable member, and so I cannot pretend that I even remember what was said, but I do want to comment a little bit about this bill.

It is quite clear that New Democrats have supported this bill all along, and my colleague from Timmins—James Bay has said it exactly right. We wanted to see this bill passed. We understand what was happening in this Legislature last spring. A lot of bells were being rung and not much business was taking place. But, you know, he did go, and he went with the approval of our caucus, to try to see whether this bill could be brought forward, whether or not it could be voted upon in the spring session, and was rebuffed. He was rebuffed by the very government that is going out there today talking about how Conservatives are trying to stop it. Whether they are going to support it or not I think is not relevant. Had the government wanted this bill to go forward last spring, it clearly could have and should have.

We believe that the people of southwestern Ontario are in an economic bind. Although I represent a Toronto riding and live in Toronto, I do have a cottage down there. It's on Lake Erie. I go through a number of little towns to get to my cottage. I travel around. I see some of the despair of southwestern Ontario. I see factories that are shut. I see stores that are boarded up. I see homes for sale by the dozens on little tiny streets. People have moved away and there is no hope. We need a bill like this to be passed.

Will the government use it as a slush fund, as my friend from the Conservatives has said? Perhaps; perhaps not. But in any event, the money will have to be spent

where it can be best spent in order to protect or to establish new jobs, and we are asking that the bill pass, notwithstanding there may be those in opposition. The government has the muscle. We will support it. Let the bill pass.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for questions and comments, and we return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to Mr. Prue's comment, it's been a long time since we stood in this House talking about this, but I remain firm in my conviction. This is nothing more than a wedge issue. If the minister wanted to have this going, he had all kinds of avenues he could have pursued. He knew the NDP would vote for it, so he could have had it through. He could have put it in as a bill of cabinet and the money would actually be flowing already. He could have put it in the budget and it would have been passed. Or, lo and behold, it could have been like the Green Energy Act. They could have just taken the dictatorial process and said, "We're going to do this," and it's in. So what's the difference here?

We can't continue, with a \$15.3-billion deficit staring us in the face, to try to pick winners and losers and think that we can micromanage across our province. A multi-million-dollar company in the Kitchener–Waterloo area was given \$44 million, I'm told, with no application. They didn't want the money, they didn't need the money, but they got the money just because, I trust, there were probably some handshakes going on behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, there's no way that we're going to do that in our riding. There's no guarantee that money will ever come back to my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound until I see something in black and white absolutely guaranteeing that my riding will be represented equally. I cannot support this and I've told the people of my riding very specifically that.

If they wanted to do things that really would help the economy, they'd lower those energy prices that are going up 50% on their watch to every single business, not to mention the homeowners.

Mr. Toby Barrett from Haldimand–Norfolk said it best: 80% of Liberal ridings got the money from the eastern development fund. We're not going to play that game. We're in fiscal reality. We need to ensure that the money we have and that we're giving out is going where it's going to do the best good. We need something that's fair across the board, that's going to touch everyone.

If they wanted to do this, the money would truly be flowing. It's nothing more than a wedge issue. They've sent speaking notes to all the Liberal candidates out there that have miraculously made it to the press. It's not going to work for them. Ontarians are too smart for that to happen. We want the money to do good for Ontario people. We will not support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the

ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Piruzza assumes ballot item number 57 and Mr. Flynn assumes ballot item number 77; and

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings to announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or his designate indicates otherwise.

I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We would like the debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to say it's a pleasure to be back in the House, but unfortunately we are under some extreme circumstances that don't necessarily make it that. But of course, it is good to see my colleagues and to debate some of the business that we had prior to the adjournment of the last session, one item of which is before us today. As a couple of my colleagues have mentioned, it's been debated thoroughly, it's been revised at committee and it is ready to go out the door here. But the question is, why do we have a government that is stalling the process? I guess it's up to them to answer to the municipalities and the people and the businesses in southwestern and eastern Ontario who are relying on this program for some assistance in probably one of the worst economic times we've seen in this province.

I come from southwestern Ontario—Essex county just outside of Windsor, the heartland of the manufacturing centre in the province and also, I would say, the epicentre of the effects of the global recession and the massive exodus of good-paying manufacturing jobs in this province and in the country. We know how bad it is out there because we've been feeling it for a very long time.

This bill, as it was presented I guess, took sort of a pretty standard approach: Let's put a pool of money together, get it out the door and see what it does—some of the standardized approaches that the Liberals have done not only with programming, but also with corporate tax rates and corporate tax reductions, where a laissez-faire, blinders-on approach was the order of the day and hope that their programs would work was their major ideology.

What we're saying and what New Democrats have proposed, not only in this bill but on a broader scale, is that you need government intervention, you need government action and you need a government that's prepared to do the hard work in ensuring that there are job guarantees.

Let me point to a couple of things that, historically, we've seen fail in this government's economic initiatives. One of them is right in my backyard in Windsor, a company called WindTronics that specialized in lower-kilowatt wind turbines. They were given \$2.7 million

from the province without any job guarantees and left that city, left Windsor, just a year after they had planted roots there, stating that they simply couldn't continue.

Now, there were about 20 or 30 jobs that were lost there—no clawback. We don't even know if that \$2.7 million has been paid back to the province. It's a similar story in Chatham at a plant called Navistar, which made large transport trucks, the rigs, the 18-wheelers. That's 1,000 jobs that were lost in that community with the federal and provincial governments putting in, all told, somewhere around \$30 million—again, no clawbacks, no job guarantees, no thresholds and without the province ever getting a dime back. We've heard the Minister of Economic Development state that potentially at some point in the future we were going to get some of that money back, but lo and behold, that has not transpired.

1500

We're back to the context of this bill. I'm four and a half minutes in, and I won't take up too much more time. I am allocated, I believe, 20 minutes, Speaker. I'm not going to take up any more time because we want this out the door. We've wanted it since the spring, so I will just simply point to some of the highlights.

Our party has proposed and had amendments to the bill, which is quite historic in the sense that amendments to bills in this House haven't happened, certainly from the opposition side, for nearly eight years. But some of the things that New Democrats proposed that make this bill better—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Maybe a couple of commas and a couple of parentheses here and there, but nothing substantive like we see in this bill.

We're really pleased that some of our really fundamental amendments made it into the bill. There has been talk that this program could have potentially been a slush fund. We don't think that can happen anymore because of making funding announcements less partisan so that local MPPs are guaranteed an invitation to the funding. There's some collegiality there. That makes it a little bit more palatable.

Also, both funds will be housed in independent corporations, with boards of directors drawn from the southwestern and eastern Ontario regions. That's quite different from what the original intent of the bill was: that it would be solely by ministerial decree in terms of who received this funding. I'll point back to the WindTronics firm: \$2.7 million. That's nearly 10% of the total fund that we're talking about. We're talking about a \$20-million fund, which, as it is, New Democrats believe is not substantial enough to address the massive job losses that we've seen, but it may be a case of "better little than nothing" here.

Some of the other amendments: There will be local advisory committees that will represent sub-regions and possibly industry sectors. Also, strengthening accountability measures, including job guarantees and more transparency in contracts: That's really important, but it is yet to be seen. We've been told that those provisions

will be built into any of the contracts, but until we see a contract come out the door, we will hold our reservations. Also, there will be a one-year review of major provisions of the act to ensure that things are working as expected and to examine possible refinements.

We've done some pretty remarkable things, pretty historic things, to this bill, things that we think make it better, make it more accountable and make it maybe more successful. But the success will be in the expediency of the release of those funds, and to get this program out the door to help those regions in southwestern Ontario. I know I've spoken to various mayors—the mayor of Windsor, who has anticipated this bill.

There really has been no reason for it to be stalled in this process at all, but I am pleased to see it back on the first day as we've resumed. Hopefully, we will get through the remainder of the debate on this portion of the reading and try to get some of those regions back up on track. I know that certainly in southwestern Ontario, there are a lot of small businesses, municipalities and non-profit organizations that have wonderful ideas that could certainly add jobs. That's what the intent of this bill is: to add employment to those regions that have been so hard hit.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've taken eight minutes and 20 seconds. I certainly would love to speak more on it, but that will give the government 12 extra minutes to get it out the door. So, hurry up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for York Centre.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Mr. Speaker, I've been listening to the comments about the eastern Ontario development fund, and I can tell you that a couple of years ago I met with all the wardens, and they just couldn't stop raving about the benefits. I just want to give you an example: 113 projects approved out of 132 applications; an applicant success rate of 86%. Only two of the 113 projects have not been successful and only one of them has received funds, a project success of over 98%; \$53.5 million leveraged \$493 million in investments—that's an eight-to-one ratio—creating and retaining over 12,000 jobs. Funds have spread out to support over 13 sectors in 13 counties across eastern Ontario. KPMG reports that currently, the eastern Ontario development fund is exceeding job-growth targets and that these are sustainable jobs and not project-related.

There's the perfect example of a fund that has been very successful, notwithstanding that there are accusations by the opposition that it's a slush fund for Liberal-held ridings. That isn't the case if you take a look at it. The applicants came in from a wide variety of industries that were located throughout eastern Ontario. The vast majority of them were approved. They got funded, and they've been successful. It is really a precedent that we want to emulate in western Ontario.

This is something that I think we should all support, and I am pleased to be here to add my support to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I was in the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus when we did a thorough study showing why eastern Ontario needed this money more, over and above the other areas of the province. Our assessment is less than half of what it is in western Ontario. At that time, we had lost 3,600 jobs in my riding alone. This was pre-recession. After the recession, we were hit again as hard. We lost 3,600 jobs in 2005 when the rest of Ontario was booming because it hadn't seen the effects of this McGuinty government yet.

It's interesting that they talk about having put a bill through the Legislature. At that time, this was done through regulation and done fairly quickly. We've been talking about this since last year. It's clearly a wedge issue trying to make an issue.

In the meantime, we saw what they did through this fund: They gave 80% of the funds to Liberal-held ridings. How can you trust this government, which, I understand, recently in western Ontario gave \$44 million to a multi-billion-dollar company without an application? Are there no rules around how far into debt we can go?

But I guess it's an issue here because they don't want to be talking about the real issues. They don't want to be talking about the wasted money: Ornge, the power plants. We saw today from my seatmate that we're trying to find out just how much they've wasted on these power plants, but they do all they can to make sure that the public doesn't find this out. Imagine. Our estimates are \$1 billion per power plant. No wonder you don't want to talk about it. Now you're talking about taking money that was directed towards eastern Ontario and moving it to the rest of the province—just more announcements, more hand-shaking.

I think it's time that we saw some results from this government, and I think the people of Ontario are looking for them. I'm hoping that they're embarrassed by some of these numbers, and that's why we're not finding out about them. But we'll see.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm pleased to add my thoughts to the debate. I think our position has been very clear. Both of my colleagues have addressed the issues here.

We know very well that southwestern Ontario has been hard hit. I grew up in Windsor, and I was aware of the boom times when things were going very well with the automotive industry. Now things are quite different in Windsor, in the surrounding areas and Essex, and there need to be some steps taken.

We made it very clear that we are happy with some of the amendments we were able to achieve. Those amendments will work to make this fund more fair, perhaps less partisan, as my colleague indicated, and perhaps restore some of the trust back into the government. We're all skeptical about that, but with having a board as opposed to a minister appointing the funds, that's a step in the right direction. Inviting local MPPs shows less partisanship and would be one tool to prevent some of the

skeptical and cynical feelings that one would have looking at the track record of this Liberal government.

But I'm hopeful that we can move in the right direction with this fund, particularly given our amendments. Let's get down to the facts and the reality here: We need to pass this bill. We've been ready to do this, and now it takes some initiative on the part of the Liberal government side to follow through. We're ready. Let's make this happen, and let's stop dragging our feet. To make it clear: It's the Liberals who are dragging their feet on this matter. We are more than ready to pass this bill. There's no further reason to delay.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One more question and comment. I recognize the member for Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Speaker. This is one of the programs that I was involved in, even though the urban part of Ottawa was excluded in the original bill. I attended a couple of announcements. I think that they were west of Ottawa. We sort of didn't really know what party was in power in those two ridings I was at—I think Carleton Place. I'm not sure of the other place. But this was to assist those small businesses to upgrade their technology and upgrade their capacity to do work. They were both exporting products. One of them was exporting hydro water applications, and it was necessary for them to get into a larger size. They were very happy. And the part of the eastern Ontario development fund that was helping them was about 10% or 15% of the dollars. That's one of the things: The \$53.5 million that was spent leveraged \$493 million in investments and made it interesting for these people who wanted to take a risk. They needed government support; they got the government support. They went ahead and they created jobs.

Out of all the projects that were invested in, I think there were a couple that didn't pan out to provide the benefits that were expected. But this is just two in the whole thing. But for anybody to suggest that we're dragging our feet on it—we've heard from the opposition today that they're not interested in supporting this bill. Certainly the third party is. They like creating jobs. They want to see this happen in southwestern Ontario as well as eastern Ontario. Help these areas that really need support these days. We have to take those businesses, help them out, create the jobs and let them expand their expertise. They've got good expertise. Let them expand their expertise with investment in technology. That, we have done, and I hope this bill passes quickly. We need it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay. That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Essex to reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the members in the Legislature who spoke to the bill today. The member for Ottawa—Orléans, I appreciate your comments. You touched on something in terms of leveraging investment and job creation. One of the programs that did that quite well was the slots-at-

racetracks program for the horse harness racing industry and the horse racing association. There was a program that took \$345 million from slots revenue and turned it into \$2 billion a year with 60,000 jobs. Now, this \$20 million program is not going to come anywhere near making up the massive loss of jobs that we're going to see in rural Ontario because of that decision. Also, the \$50 million in transition funding is going to—it's a pittance in terms of helping that industry transition to anything viable that may remain after that decision.

But regardless, we understand that there are opportunities for government to play a role in incentivizing and enticing entrepreneurs and existing businesses to expand, new research and development capabilities, as well as non-profit associations and municipalities, who we know have been feeling the pinch, as many have indicated here in this House, and who could use these.

What's great about this bill is that the NDP has been able to enact some safeguards that present more accountability, more transparency and more effectiveness ultimately when those dollars roll out. We certainly do have some concerns about the fact that the fund, at \$20 million, is small in terms of its size, in ratio and in relationship to the amount of jobs that have been lost. We just don't see it as being completely effective, but we will see I guess on an order of magnitude as to how effective it actually is once it's passed. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to rise to take a few moments to speak on Bill 11. I hope in my heart that I'm the last speaker today.

Just to give you a little history, back just after the election, I wrote Minister Duguid—in fact, it was in early November—asking about the issue of the eastern Ontario development fund, since it was a fund that certain communities in eastern Ontario were able to access. He chose at the time not to engage me in dialogue, but later on that month, on November 29, he tabled a bill. Since that time, leading up to second reading on March 5, I spoke and engaged with many mayors, the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, about the fact that, because it was a wedge bill, there was really no need for this legislation. The fund operated quite easily without a piece of legislation for four years; it was included in the budget. I suggest that if the minister had taken my advice three weeks before he tabled the bill, back in the middle of June when the budget was passed, there wouldn't be an issue and there wouldn't have been an issue at AMO.

As you saw this afternoon, when the government was asked to bring forward its business, the government House leader stood up and indicated that Bill 11 was being called. I don't make that decision; the New Democrats don't make that decision; the government makes that decision.

When a bill is brought forward in November, on November 29—really, the die was cast on March 5. On March 5, the vote was 68 to 35. It pretty well indicated

what was going to happen with this bill, that ultimately it was going to pass.

The other issue was, it really collapsed and was voted on on March 5 because this party allowed it to collapse. We didn't belabour the issue. We had staked our position pretty clearly. I think it was an indication when the members of caucus voted against the bill that they had serious concerns with the way the bill was structured. The bill had the minimum time at committee. In fact, it was reported back to the House on April 17. So from April 17 to June 19, whatever the day was that we passed the budget—June 20 or 19, whatever—I think there was ample time for the government to call the bill.

Again, was the bill perfect? Absolutely not. That's why we're voting against it. Were there issues in eastern Ontario with the way the fund was structured? There were lots of ideas. The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus had ideas on changes to the bill at their meeting in January, and they've consistently communicated those to the government. Were there changes incorporated by certain mayors who came to the committee, who said—like Invest Ottawa, that more of Ottawa needed to be included? I think it was Durham region. There were a number of municipal politicians from Durham inquiring; people from Muskoka; all over the place. There were lots of ideas. I remember the mayor of Stratford bringing up an idea that perhaps it should be more of a loan-based program, replenishing itself by repayable loans. So there were lots of ideas, but there weren't very many amendments.

Our issue, obviously, was: The bill was flawed. Other than dramatically changing it or splitting it—it just wasn't procedurally possible for any amendments for us.

We're here today because of some of the comments from local mayors. I know the mayor of Brockville was quoted in the paper. I think the quote was, "We don't care about politics." There were some mixed messages though, Speaker, that came out of AMO, and I know there were a number of ministers—I'm not saying it was you, Minister Wynne—and representatives of the government who talked about this bill coming back in January or in the new year.

A mayor told me that there was a comment at one meeting about perhaps going back to committee, which to me would only happen if the government prorogued and this bill died on the order paper and had to be reintroduced. So I don't know. I obviously wasn't privy to some of those meetings that the local mayors in eastern Ontario had with the government. All I know is what they've told me, and those were issues that they talked about.

In terms of the map, I know the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, Speaker, yourself, received a letter on August 17 that the true—and a quote from I believe it was the minister. Yes, it was, Minister Duguid. His quote was, "It is true that geographic boundaries have not yet been defined. However, we believe that a small and focused fund"—and it goes on and on for southwestern Ontario. So there are a number of issues

that the mayors still have outstanding with the fund, issues that I think could have been dealt with long ago. So there still is this uncertainty on where the boundaries are and whether there are going to be changes on how it's operated. There are lots of suggestions that need to be done.

There have also been some suggestions in eastern Ontario about the federal program, and whether people agree with the federal program or not. It was divided up equally among all the regions so everybody got an equal piece. There weren't any winners and losers; everyone had the same piece. So there are other programs that other governments are administering on economic development with different criteria than this fund, and also different delivery models. Presently, the ministry does this delivery; in the federal program, it's the CFDC. So there isn't a bunch of bureaucrats or politicians; it's a community group. So there are lots of different programs.

I guess the reason why I hope that I'm the last speaker today is because I think everyone acknowledges that this has dragged on. We've made our points. I think we all know how the vote is going to take place. But we've got some big issues. Our leader, Tim Hudak, talked about three words today: freeze, fix and reduce. Members of our party have put forward a plan to reduce business taxes that we think is important in this province. We've released two white papers which we have shared with members in the industrial community, the manufacturing sector. I know I've shared them, and some of the things they've been very interested in. Obviously, on the energy white paper, affordable energy is something that they need to compete on. I know my community gets letters from across the board, from the St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency, extolling the virtues of the United States. The very last component is, "Some of the lowest-cost and most reliable electricity in North America (50% less than you might be paying now)." That's a big issue. Labour is a big issue as well, and I know many of the manufacturing sector have looked at our white paper and provided me with very constructive comments. So I think we've put some very constructive ideas on the table.

Again, we've got an issue where we've got a \$30-billion deficit on the horizon. We need to get our spending under control, we need to get our economic fundamentals right and we need to move forward on some other pieces of legislation. So I'm asking for consideration that—I don't need any comments or questions. You've all made some very good points today. If debate collapses and ultimately we get the vote, to vote however our caucuses and we want to vote, I think the mayors would be very impressed that, for once, we've put politics aside and just let our votes and the decisions speak for themselves. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You know, I was going to let the debate—I was not going to stand up, but something

that the member—it was the white paper thing. I haven't read the white paper thing, but it's the white paper thing that's been around for 30 years, I would imagine. But there was the one thing that the honourable member from Leeds—Grenville touched on—and I do agree with all the other things: Let's put partisanship aside; let's get this bill out the door. There are lots of issues that we have to deal with. But the reduce, reuse, recycle of the white paper—what was it? Reuse, fix—whatever. The last part was the tax cuts.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I know. It all adds up to tax cuts, anyway, corporate tax cuts. Our combined corporate tax rate in the province of Ontario is 28.5%. In neighbouring jurisdictions that we compete with—Michigan, right across the border. I can drive a golf ball across the Detroit River; that's how close it is to Windsor, and I can do that, actually. I know it's a big drive, but I can. It's 38.2%; New York, 36.1%; Pennsylvania, 37.8%. The Great Lakes weighted average is 36.6%, and the US weighted average is 36.1%. What I'm trying to get at here is that the across-the-board, blind-faith, trickle-down economic models are not working. We're trying it here in Ontario. We've cut. We've slashed corporate tax cuts. We've still got to pay for roads; we've still got to pay for hospitals and schools. And if you want to continue—I mean, that's what I assume you mean by reducing—you're not going to get to the point of a cohesive civil society if you continue to degrade the quality of the society that you live in.

Corporate tax cuts and reductions are not distributed fairly under that type of regime, and they're profoundly regressive, okay? So find a different mantra, because what obviously the white papers that have been put out state is that they have not been working. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I agree with the member from Leeds—Grenville. I hope that his will be the last 10-minute speech, but I did want to speak to this just for a couple of minutes.

The southwestern Ontario economic development fund is something that I've heard about from my community, from my chamber of commerce, that they are very supportive of. They want to see us put that in place. I think of a retirement party that I was at for Lou Rinaldi, and there were a number of mayors from the Northumberland-Quinte area. As I spoke to the mayors through the evening and they got up to speak, mayor after mayor talked about the impact of the eastern economic development fund in that particular riding.

When I think about the southwestern economic development fund—Speaker, I don't know whether you recall, but the Minister of Economic Development and Trade did one of the consultations on the southwestern economic development fund in Guelph. I was amazed. I thought, "We'll have people from Guelph and Wellington, and maybe some Waterloo region folks." I was

amazed. People from all over southwestern Ontario showed up. There were people from Huron county. There were people from Waterloo region. There were people from Grey-Bruce. There were people from the Chatham-Essex area. There were people from the Stratford area. There were people from all over southwestern Ontario who came to Guelph. What was surprising to me was that this was the second or third meeting they'd come to, but they wanted a chance to talk to the Minister of Economic Development and tell him in person how important this economic development fund was to people all across southwestern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Leeds-Grenville. He makes a lot of points, but he took me back to my youth. When I was in university, required reading was a little book called *The True Believer*. It was by Eric Hoffer. I still remember it. He was a longshoreman who was quite a philosopher, and he wrote a book called *The True Believer*. It was about somebody who believes something so strongly that all the rational thought in the world won't dissuade them.

You have a member like the member from Leeds-Grenville, who truly believes that if he cuts corporate taxes to the bone, if he makes the rich richer than rich, if he takes away all the money from ordinary people—the youth, the middle class—if he makes sure that all of our services are starting to suffer as they are in the United States, we will be like them.

I think that he ought to think about what he really wants. I think, even though he waves around and says that a foreign jurisdiction—I have to assume it's New York, being where he's from—can offer hydro at 50% less—really, is that what he wants to see?

Travel in the United States. Go to the cities that are hollowed-out cores. Go there and look, where you can buy a house in some of those states because they're all boarded up. Go to some of those places and see what the true belief of following Reaganomics really produced, because it's not something we should emulate here. If he hasn't read *The True Believer*, read it; or if he's read it, read it again.

He talked about a couple of things, though. He said that the mayors are unsure in eastern Ontario. I'm sure they're unsure, because this has taken a long, circuitous route and they don't know how much money is actually

going to come. But I'm sure that, as unsure as they are, if the money is forthcoming, they'll take it.

The last one is the federal programs. Yes, the federal programs may be a little bit more equitable. Maybe the government should look at them as well. But in the end, the money is needed in eastern Ontario and southwestern Ontario. People need it in order to produce jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? We'll return to the member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the members for their comments and questions. I want to be true to my previous comments. I've said what I'm going to say, and I hope that debate collapses and we put this issue behind us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Duguid has moved third reading of Bill 11, An Act respecting the continuation and establishment of development funds in order to promote regional economic development in eastern and southwestern Ontario.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a deferral notice signed by the chief government whip. Therefore, the vote will be deferred until tomorrow after question period at the time of deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Orders of the day.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1531.

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AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM

No. 70

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First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 28 August 2012

Mardi 28 août 2012



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Honourable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 August 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 août 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let us pray.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 5, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Scarborough–Pickering.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Pickering–Scarborough East, Speaker, with respect.

I'm very happy to speak this morning on the healthy homes tax renovation. This is something we've been talking about for some time on the government side, and it really does give priority to the programs that address the needs of families. We want to strengthen the economy, but most importantly we want to help seniors who can stay at home, who want to stay at home, to stay there as long as possible.

Of course, we'll still continue to support seniors who need to be in a long-term-care facility—we'll still continue to make investments there, but this credit is to help seniors who can stay at home and want to stay at home. We know the demographics are changing. We know that the age span of seniors is much larger now. We know that many seniors prefer to stay at home, if at all possible, and that there are better health outcomes associated with that. That's why I think it's very important that we move forward with the home renovation tax credit. Not only will it help seniors stay in their home longer but it will help members sharing a home with a senior continue to keep the family together. I think everyone agrees that that's incredibly important.

There are other benefits, such as tax benefits that benefit taxpayers by relieving pressures on long-term-

care home costs. This home renovation tax credit is also estimated to support 10,500 jobs per year. That's very significant in this economy that we're in. This credit, if passed, will support about \$800 million in home renovation activities. That's the connection to the jobs and economy, Speaker.

If passed, effective October 1, 2011—so it's retroactive—seniors, homeowners, tenants and people who share a home with a senior relative would be allowed to claim a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 for expenses related to permanent modifications to their home. I was actually with the Premier of Ontario the day he announced that this tax credit would be retroactive to October 1, 2011. That has resonated very well in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, as well as with other Ontarians—with seniors, with families of seniors—who see this as beneficial, and quite frankly a lot of them are getting ready to file their claims under this. They've been collecting receipts. That's been the advice: Collect your receipts and get ready, because it is proposed to be retroactive. So the benefit will increase all the more, not just the day it passes here, but back to October 1, 2011. But we do need to get on with this. There's a gap developing between that time and where we are now. I think Ontarians expect us to move the passage of this forward.

People have also asked me, "Tracy, how are we going to pay for this program? You have a deficit. You're very focused on reducing the deficit in government," which we are, but I say that, yes, we have to reduce the deficit, but the program costs for this tax credit would be offset in other areas. So it's in the context of the budget that's already set. We, at least on the government side, firmly believe that the biggest threat to health care and protection of seniors and others is a deficit. So that's why we have to address the deficit at the same time. But the good news is that this program is fully costed out in the budget. If the take-up for this program is somewhat similar to what the federal 2009 home renovations tax credit is, up to 380,000 people could benefit from this credit every year—380,000 people. That's fantastic. That will provide some financial relief to seniors and, as I said, more importantly, allow seniors to stay at home—those who can—and family members who are having a senior live with them could also claim the credit.

I know many residents where I live feel this is important. Continued home ownership is important to them, and this tax benefit really is part of a bigger package of things we are doing for seniors and have been doing for seniors to help them stay at home, whether it's introducing more

PSWs at home, our aging strategy. I can speak to that in a moment. It's important to put this in the context of everything else—the family caregiver leave and other things like that; it's just part of a bigger strategy to help seniors.

The credit will help seniors stay in their homes longer and benefit the taxpayers and relieve pressure on long-term-care costs, as I mentioned earlier. Effective October 1, senior homeowners and tenants and people who share a home with a senior will be allowed to claim that refund credit of up to \$1,500 for expenses related to permanent modifications to their homes. Expenses would be eligible only to the extent that they improve accessibility or help a senior be more functional or mobile at home. An extreme example would be that hot tubs wouldn't be covered under this, but things that really help accessibility would be. They would have to be of a permanent nature.

From an accessibility point of view, I think everyone agrees that accessibility is good for everyone. When modifications are made to the home, they may well be an asset to the home later, when the house is sold. Removing barriers for everyone is so important. We have an aging population and we never know when any of us could be facing some sort of accessibility challenge, so removing barriers can have a bigger effect than what this tax credit will have immediately in terms of better access for seniors.

0910

People ask me what kinds of things are permitted under this tax credit. I'll just mention a few of those now.

Certain renovations to permit first-floor occupancy or secondary suites, such as granny flats or in-law suites: I see a lot of those happening more and more in homes where people want—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me. I'd just ask members to take their conversations outside or speak in a way that doesn't interfere with the speaker. Thank you.

You may continue.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that.

We're seeing more creation of these in-law suites and so forth, so it's great that those expenses would be eligible under this tax credit.

Of course, grab bars and related reinforcements around toilets, bathtubs and showers: I think we're fairly familiar with those.

Handrails in corridors: This is again a small, often discreet thing that can make a big difference in terms of people moving from one place to another.

Wheelchair ramps; stairs; wheelchair lifts; elevators; bath lifts; walk-in bathtubs; wheel-in showers; widening passage doors: That's very important, because the building code provides for a certain width for doors, but people's wheelchairs can really vary in size. My husband, a paraplegic, has a certain size chair, but our friends in other chairs, especially powered chairs, have much wider dimensions to the wheelchair, especially those motorized chairs. Widening passage doors is often

something that needs to be done, even in fairly new houses, not just older houses. That's very important.

Lowering existing counters/cupboards; installing adjustable counters/cupboards; and also light switches and electrical outlets placed in accessible locations: We know that's important. We're talking about independence here as well, not having to rely on other family members or support people to do these basic things that allow us to function and allow seniors to function successfully in their home.

Door locks that are easy to operate; lever handles on doors and taps, instead of knobs, which a lot of people are doing anyway: Again, accessibility is good for everybody, and that's a good example of that.

Pullout shelves under counters to enable work from a seated position; non-slip bathroom flooring; hand-held showers or an adjustable rod or high-mounting brackets; additional light fixtures through the home: Lighting, of course, is so important to the accessibility of seniors as they age and have a higher incidence of falling and other risks, so those lighting fixtures could be quite beneficial.

Swing-clear hinges on doors to widen doorways; creation of knee space under the basin to enable use from a seated position; and insulation of any hot water pipes: The tax credit is quite comprehensive as it looks at the total costs of these kinds of renovations.

Relocation of taps to the front or side of a sink for easy access; hands-free taps; motion-activated lighting: Again, these are things you often see in new houses today, so everyone recognizes these things are beneficial to everyone, but in houses that don't have these features and for seniors who would benefit from that, the tax renovation will cover that.

Touch-and-release drawers and cupboards and drawers that pull out fully; modular and movable versions of a permanent fixture, such as modular ramps and non-fixed bath lifts: These are just some examples of what would be covered. This certainly isn't a full and complete list.

Expenses would not be eligible if the primary purpose were to increase the value of the home, such as roof repairs, redecorating, new flooring or landscaping. The attempt, as I said earlier, is to help seniors who can stay at home and who want to stay at home to do so. That's what this is all about.

As I said, this tax credit is really part of a broader number of measures, so it's important to consider this tax credit in that context.

We've had a number of achievements around supporting seniors. I'll just mention a couple of them that tie into this: the enhancements to energy and property tax credits for seniors. We have personal income tax cuts: On average, 93% of income taxpayers are getting personal income tax cuts and are now saving about \$200 annually.

We have the Ontario sales tax credit.

We have seniors in the north: Northern residents who pay rent or property tax for their principal residence are eligible for an annual credit of up to \$130 for a single person and up to \$200 for a family. That's a prime

example where this tax credit works hand in hand with other initiatives associated with seniors staying at home and aging gracefully and with independence at home.

We have increasing access to locked-in accounts. The government introduced reforms to the rules for locked-in accounts, to give seniors and other Ontarians more flexibility in accessing funds in these accounts.

We have the generic drugs. Of course, we've all heard about that, where the government reformed Ontario's drug system to facilitate lower generic drug prices, benefiting all Ontarians, but especially our seniors.

Pension and retirement income security, pension reform and the broader issue of retirement income adequacy are key priorities for the Ontario government. We're playing a lead role in a national effort to review the state of the current retirement income system, its future sustainability and options that could strengthen it for tomorrow's seniors. The government has modernized the Pension Benefits Act with two pieces of landmark legislation in 2009 and 2010 that received all-party consent. So, clearly, all parties are on board when it comes to pension and retirement income security for seniors.

On the health side, the government is strengthening the accountability of home care services among the service providers, community care access centres throughout the province, and introducing new quality measures to strengthen the way the CCACs make arrangements for home care services. I'm a recipient of that, and some of my elderly relatives are as well. I think that's fantastic. It again ties into helping our seniors stay at home if they want to and as long as they want to.

In terms of retirement homes, for the first time in Ontario's history, the care provided to seniors living in retirement homes will be regulated under provincial legislation. Now, that is just reinforcing the point I made earlier for seniors who cannot stay at home, who may not be able to take advantage of this tax credit. We are continuing to invest in seniors. It's not only at home, as some critics have suggested; we will continue to invest in retirement homes and long-term-care facilities.

In 2007, the McGuinty government launched the four-year \$1.1-billion Aging at Home strategy that I mentioned earlier. This is designed to provide support to seniors and their caregivers, to help seniors stay healthy and live with dignity and independence in the comfort of their own home.

Going back to long-term-care homes, we've taken steps to ensure that seniors who cannot live at home enjoy access to the very highest quality long-term-care services. Again, if a senior is able to stay at home and is able to take advantage of this tax credit, I think it is important that they know that we continue to make new investments on the long-term-care side, adding more than 8,200 new beds in long-term-care homes since 2003, increasing long-term-care funding by over \$1 billion since 2003, funding more than 6,100 new front-line staff in those long-term-care homes, including 2,300 nurses. In 2009, the government publicly reported through the Ontario Health Quality Council for the first time on quality

of care in long-term homes in the form of resident health outcomes and satisfaction. So again, for seniors who are anticipating making that transition from home to long-term care, it's important to look at that bigger picture.

We also have the Ontario strategy to combat elder abuse, whether seniors are staying at home or elsewhere. With \$900,000 in annual funding from the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse is working with local elder abuse networks and community agencies to implement the strategy's three priorities. First is the coordination of community services; second, training front-line staff; and third, raising awareness of where seniors can get help.

0920

We also have our affordable housing strategy, Speaker. We've also invested \$540 million under the affordable housing program extension, which includes \$307 million in dedicated funding for rental units for low-income seniors. This is very important because, as I mentioned, tenants are eligible under this healthy homes renovation tax credit as well. This affordable housing strategy goes hand in hand with that.

As part of the poverty reduction strategy announced in December 2008, the government is investing more than \$5 million annually to stabilize funding for all 47 service managers that operate rent bank programs across Ontario. Since 2004, Ontario has invested more than \$39 million in rent banks and has prevented more than 28,200 evictions. So again, affordable housing, combating elder abuse, long-term home care strategies, aging at home strategies in particular—all these things go hand in hand with the healthy home renovation tax credit.

We want seniors who can stay at home to be able to do that, and we want to support the families who support seniors. I can think of my own situation, where I had power of attorney for my grandmother and my great-aunt. The people supporting those people need the support too. That's what this tax credit does by allowing people who own the house and who have a senior with them to be eligible for that tax credit. We know about the impact on caregivers. We know about the financial and emotional challenges of caring for an elder person. So this tax credit provides some relief to those people who are taking care of a loved one at home and helping that senior continue to operate as independently as possible, with as much dignity as possible, through their golden years.

Just to sort of recap: Again, people ask me what the cost is. It's about \$60 million in 2011-12, and will be funded by lower spending on existing business support programs in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, as well as lower-than-forecast costs for tax-related expenditures on the revenue side. These savings fully offset the cost of the proposed healthy home tax credit in 2011-12. As I said earlier, this tax credit creates many benefits from a jobs point of view and a construction industry point of view, but most of all, most importantly, it is to support our aging population, to support our seniors. It's part of a bigger strategy. It is important that

we get on with this. As I said, when the Premier announced the retroactivity of this proposed bill, it was very, very well received by people in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East and many other ridings. I just would be a bit concerned if we don't move this along because asking people to save receipts further back—we all know how challenging that is, to keep track of expenses from the past. So I think it's incumbent on all of us to work together to pass this bill and move forward. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate? The member for Nipissing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments: the member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm not certain that there are a lot of seniors with a spare \$10,000, but what I can tell you is what the seniors are talking to me about in Nipissing, and they are talking about their high energy bills. So when I'm at energy forums, as I've been through many throughout Ontario, they ask the question, "Why has my hydro bill doubled?" I take the time to explain to them that the Green Energy Act is the culprit of their hydro bill being doubled. I take the time to give them some details about what has happened.

What has happened is that we have a so-called green energy plan that takes wind power and forces it into communities. It takes the decision-making power of their local municipalities away and leaves it strictly in the hands of the provincial government. It gives the wind producers the highest possible FIT program, feed-in tariff program, payments in the world, and it has caused a tremendous pain to the seniors. That FIT program is overly generous, and it allows for wind turbines and solar farms in areas that have seniors against seniors, families against families.

This is what the seniors want to talk about: why their energy bill is so high, and why a 500-foot-high wind turbine is being placed in Powassan or Trout Creek or Mattawa in my riding; why, when you drive down the main street of Sundridge, there's a solar panel on Main Street. It's because the decision-making power of the municipalities is taken away. That's the issue that seniors want to talk about: their high energy bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would just like to say that, in my humble opinion, this is just another political smokescreen to boost popularity of the Liberal Party before an election. I'll have you know that if they really want to do something—\$10,000 does nothing. Some 90% of the people cannot afford \$10,000. So that's a smokescreen.

Secondly, they might want to do something about the HST on there and the hydro. Half the people, or three quarters of the seniors in this province, cannot afford to pay their hydro bills, so where are you going to find the \$10,000 that you have to borrow, Speaker—borrow—when you can't even pay your bills, to do something that

you can't get done? The only possible way that this could happen is if maybe the service clubs in their area step up to the plate, like the Lions Club or the Optimists. Service clubs might be able to come and help some of the seniors with some of their changes to their structures.

But, Speaker, these half-measure bills that I keep seeing day in and day out in this place are just not doing anything for the people out there. People are unemployed; people can't afford their bills. There are no jobs.

Everyone says, "Oh, everything's great, and waiting times are down in the hospitals." Well, I was in one yesterday: six hours before I saw a doctor—six hours. "Waiting times are down." Give me a break. It's not true. Everything is made out to make it look like honey and butter in this place, and when you get out in the real world, it isn't happening.

So, with all due respect, Speaker, this is just another one of these bills to make them popular, make them look good, and nothing will be accomplished again. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Let me say at the onset this morning, I thought it was an outstanding speech delivered by my colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East on the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

But let me tell you a little story. Just last week I had to visit Rona, which is on Chemong Road West in Peterborough. My wife, Karan, sent me out to get some white paint. In fact, I was to do the painting this week, but I'm back here; the Legislature was brought back.

So I talked to the manager at Rona—a great guy, a great guy. I said, "Can you take me over to the plumbing section for a moment?" I was getting white paint, but I went to the plumbing section, and I got to see those new bathtubs that have the special door that allows seniors to have accessibility to these new-design bathtubs, if they have mobility issues. I said to my good friend the manager of Rona—it's a great hardware store, just like Home Hardware and Home Depot—

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: But let me say, when I was chatting to the manager—they're very supportive of this healthy homes renovation tax credit. They can just see their customers lining up 10 deep, because when we pass this bill, they'll all be coming in to buy those new bathtubs that are designed for people who have mobility problems. Then I went into other sections of Rona, where they have other devices that could be acquired by a senior, to keep them in their home, through this healthy homes renovation tax credit.

The member from Pickering-Scarborough East highlighted some of these issues this morning: that we have a number of businesses out there that will significantly take advantage of this.

I don't know why the opposition wants to hold this up. Every seniors' group in the province of Ontario is supportive of this measure. I tell them today: It's time to get on board. Let's generate business for Rona, Home Depot and Home Hardware.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Leeds–Grenville.
0930

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and provide a couple of minutes worth of comments on Bill 2, which the government calls the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit. I've been up several times, done some questions and comments, had my rotations both at second and third readings, and I have to agree with my colleague the member for Nipissing. We've had so many people respond since the election last October about hydro costs. I thought it was a big step for that first week that we met as a Legislature after the election that the opposition could move forward on Bill 4, which provided the relief that so many taxpayers spoke of during that campaign. The government, instead of moving forward with that legislation, instead of going with the will of the Legislature, presented this bill.

I have to tell you, unlike the member for Peterborough, I haven't had a lot of folks asking for this. In fact, most people in my riding have talked about their inability to spend \$10,000 on their homes. They don't have that type of money to be able to provide the renovations that the government offers. In fact, when I did my rotation on this bill, I talked about a gentleman who did call me. His name is Ron Stewart. He runs a small business in my community that helps seniors in their homes: helps cutting their grass, doing odd jobs around their homes, things that aren't covered by this bill. I know that there are many businesses like Ron Stewart's out there that try every day to do those little things that help a senior to stay in their home, to stay active, and don't include large expenditures that seniors don't have.

Speaker, I suggest this bill is not what seniors are asking for, and I'm glad to be able to provide those comments today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I just want to clarify some of the myths and facts. This often happens with legislation. Under this proposed tax credit, seniors are not obligated to spend \$10,000 in renovations. No one is at all suggesting that. It's a tax credit for expenditures up to \$10,000. So there are seniors who will absolutely spend \$10,000, and there are others who won't. It's a portion of that that's the tax credit.

In terms of the members opposite saying people haven't heard about the tax credit, well, that is indeed my concern, too. If we delay further and the whole rollout of this legislation gets delayed, we lose opportunity. We lose the momentum of people who have said they are anxious to see this come forward as part of a comprehensive package of supports for seniors.

There is communication work to be done, if and when the tax credit is passed. So I encourage all members opposite to move this forward and recognize it's part of a bigger puzzle. This isn't about home heating; this isn't about other expenses. This is about renovating one's home to make it accessible for seniors, whether the sen-

ior or a family member owns the home, to allow seniors who want to stay at home, who want to age with dignity and grace, to stay at home.

It's part of a bigger puzzle. No one's suggesting that this is going to solve everything and every challenge that seniors face. That's why we have an aging at home strategy. That's why we have more supports for long-term care and retirement homes. So I strongly encourage members opposite to consider this bill in that context, and while not every senior is doing renovations, those who are at home may do it and may find this an extremely beneficial tax credit.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I suppose I'm supposed to say, "Great to be back." Great to be back.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thrilled.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thrilled. Why are we back? We're back to bail out the government from its own incompetence. That's the reality, folks. I know we're debating Bill 2 this morning, but I think it bears pointing out to the millions of viewers out there that the reason this Legislature has been recalled is to pass—interestingly enough, the education minister is the same one who came up with the Flick Off campaign a few years ago. Do you remember that?

Mr. Ted Arnott: Don't forget the garage mahal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And the garage mahal—we all know about the garage mahal. I don't know where she's parking all her cars these days.

She originally called this bill the Putting Students First Act, but typical of Liberal principles, as soon as they get some kind of push-back, my God, they change the name: An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. Isn't that something? It is very difficult in this day and age, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, not to be just a little bit cynical.

Of course, we're going to talk in depth on Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector, renamed, Madam Speaker. Of course, that's going to be coming later today. This morning we're talking about Bill 2.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Please. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Patience, patience. We'll get there.

But the cynicism is no less. When you look at Bill 2—and we've heard the Liberal spin, which is the order of the day. We get the Liberal spin on any kind of bill. I've been here since 2003, and I don't think there's been a Parliament yet—it's been an increasing trend of the Liberals since 2003 to bring out bills that are designed solely for the politics of the issue, not about helping people in general, but the politics of the issue. Bill 2 is so much about the politics of the issue. It's about separating people and, in the world of the Liberals, knocking the dominoes off one at a time. This bill is designed for no other reason but to buy the votes of a group of people.

One at a time, they're going to put money out, which is everybody's money, to try to secure the votes of one group of the population. This particular group is seniors, seniors to whom they say that with this rebate program, tax credit, you'll be able to stay in your home longer.

But it's not aimed at seniors in general. It's not aimed at the senior whose furnace isn't working and could use \$4,000 or \$5,000 or whatever for a new furnace. There's no program for them. It's specifically to deal with issues of accessibility, so it's one group.

We talk about seniors and the low-income side of the ledger. That's the kind of senior that my mother-in-law is, for example. She'll be 80 on her next birthday, and she just this year quit going out and cleaning people's houses to earn a little extra money, because the only income she has—she emigrated from Germany in the 1950s. She never worked outside the home. Her husband worked in a sawmill making menial wages and also was a subsistence farmer. She has no other income except what she gets from her old age pension. She never had a job outside the home for which she was paid. She worked like a dog on the farm—worked like a bull, worked like a horse, worked like an ox, whatever—but she never earned any money. She doesn't fit into the category of a rich senior; she fits into the category of a poor senior.

But there is a category of rich seniors. We all know them. We all know the ones who go to Florida for the winter. They drive down with their Mercedes or their Cadillac or their Lincoln or something else. They are there.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Or they have a golf course behind their house.

0940

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's right. And when they're here, they golf every day. They're members of the country club. They exist.

We're realists here, Speaker. Those folks don't need the \$10,000 eligibility tax credit, but they can get it. They can get it because that's the way this Liberal government wants to play the game. Every piece of legislation is designed not to deliver the most good, not to deliver the greatest amount of help to the greatest amount of people, to the largest amount of people, but it's designed to, one at a time, "Let's see if we can't attract this group of people to the Liberal Party so we can hang on to power, so we can wreck this province more than we have in the last eight years and continue to do so going forward." As the Premier says, going forward together—going forward to hell in a handbasket.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw, Speaker.

That's what they want. This is all designed to, slowly but surely, get their tentacles into every little group of people and say, "We care about you. We're the Liberal Party and we're going to take care of you. We know best. We know best what is good for you."

You know, when I talk to people about this bill, they're actually shocked. "I don't fit into the senior cat-

egory," they say. "But you know what? We're struggling. We could use a little help, and all we get from Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals is more pain, more burden, increased taxes, increased energy bills and increased regulations." People who work in the forestry business are losing their jobs because the Liberal government is basically doing everything they can to shut that industry down by regulating them out of business. They ask me, "Is there anything out there to help us?" Regrettably, I have to say to them, "No, there isn't, because you haven't come into the plan yet. But maybe—just maybe—they'll take some of the general pot of money and try to secure your votes with it as well." That's the way they work.

When you look at this bill, you ask yourself—the government talks about it being a priority. All they really want to do is keep talking about it, because this bill was introduced on November 23, 2011. We are now essentially in the fall session of the following year. I know this is called an extension of the spring session, just for the purposes of putting it in the right category parliamentary-wise, I suppose, but we're almost into September; we're almost into the fall session. A year will have gone by without actually implementing this bill.

It really sounds like a priority for this government to me when you take a year to even implement it. I mean, are they that lost over at that cabinet table or in the Premier's office, the corner office on the second floor? I urge the folks out in television land to come and visit the Legislature sometime and go look at that—oh, no, you won't be able to get into the corner office; sorry. I'm not sure what goes on in there; I've never been there. But you have to ask yourself, what kind of planning is going on there? Who are the deep thinkers there who say, "This is a priority," and then cannot produce almost a year later?

Is it really a priority, or did they just want to talk about it? Do they just want to talk about how much they love our seniors and want them to stay in their homes? That's the side of politics that I find really, really difficult to deal with. Whatever happened to straight talk? Whatever happened to just dealing with the issues that we get to deal with, dealing with the problems of society and forging ahead with workable, realistic solutions to those problems? Whatever happened to that, Madam Speaker? Is this what people have to look forward to in the 21st century, the games people play?

Who was it? Was it Joe South or somebody who wrote that song, Games People Play? It says: "The games people play now / Every night and every day now." Well, maybe it will be night and day, because I think the House leader wants us to sit nights, to play more games in passing legislation in this House. Maybe they should have worked harder in the spring session to get this bill passed, but they didn't do anything. They just sat there playing games—just by day.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You know, the bells—I hear there's some ringing going on there. I think it's in people's heads, Madam Speaker. The bells do not slow

down the passage of legislation at all. The clock keeps ticking. The clock keeps ticking throughout all of that process. It adds to the debate time, and this government, which has had no problem—no problem—coming up with closure motions on debates for whatever bill they want, could have done that on any bill. They always look to try to put the blame somewhere else.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm not a lawyer, Madam Speaker, but I'll tell you, I did watch Law and Order once in a while. I stayed in a Holiday Inn Select one night, or whatever that was. You know, when they'd be fighting those cases on Law and Order, Jack McCoy would say, "You cannot close a door that you chose to open," if he was dealing with the defence. The defence opened the door here. They wanted to talk about the bells. So I think I have every right then, Madam Speaker, to talk about the reason for the bells and the disgusting scandal at Ornge that has been perpetrated on the people of this province by this government and that health minister. Where is the resignation of that health minister over the Ornge scandal? Why do they keep pretending that the things that went on at Ornge are somebody else's fault? Now they want to talk about bells in this chamber? My goodness gracious, Madam Speaker.

You know, my riding is the subject now of an investigation in Ornge, a death, an investigation by the coroner of a lady who regrettably passed away in my riding as a client of Ornge—a client of Ornge. You know what happened, Madam Speaker? The night that it was raised in the House here, the CEO of Ornge called the deceased's husband and apologized and said there would be an investigation. Do you know what they did at Ornge? A couple of months later, they sent out a customer satisfaction survey to the deceased lady asking her how she liked the service at Ornge.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I ask the member to come back to the bill that we are debating.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am back to the bells, Speaker. They talked about the bells.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, the bill? I was talking bells.

So yeah, Bill 2. You know what? These folks are seniors. But a few months later she gets a customer satisfaction survey asking her how Ornge did. Quite an improvement at Ornge under this government, isn't it? That was shameful.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I remind the member to come back to Bill 2.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am running short of time.

I want to speak on a number of things. I've got a couple of things written down here, but they don't actually speak to Bill 2, so I'm going to leave those for another time and speak about Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit—the healthy homes renovation tax credit, as we commonly know it by. We have to ask

ourselves what they're really trying to accomplish here. No matter how I slice and dice this, it comes back to the same thing: This is a cynical play at votes.

0950

You know, I'll get back to my mother-in-law for a minute, that group of seniors who fits into that category where they don't have much. They do not have much. She doesn't have \$10,000 to do the renovations on her place. In fact, she has a hard time paying her hydro bill. So does everybody. A lot of people have a hard time paying their hydro bill in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, because he decided that politics would trump policy. He decided he was going to try to convince the world in Ontario that if we just go down with this subsidization scheme, we're going to have a better power system. He didn't tell you that it was going to cost you; you're going to pay through the teeth. No, he didn't tell you that. So now we've got a situation where people are looking at their hydro bills and they're asking, "What's going on here? Why am I paying 150% increases in hydro since Dalton McGuinty took office?" And you know what, folks? It's going to get worse.

Let's talk about the politics behind the decision to cancel a power plant in Mississauga that we've opposed from the start. They paid \$190 million to cancel that. Who's going to pay for that, I ask the member from Pickering-Scarborough East? Who's going to pay for that? Why don't you tell your constituents who's going to pay that \$190 million? Shame on the lot of you. That's \$190 million, which they have admitted was for no other reason but to save seats in Mississauga. The Minister of Energy at the estimates had to admit it was a political decision—a political decision to shut it down. So if you're willing to put \$190 million on the table for politics, how much are you putting on the table for this? How much are you going to put on the table for every other bill, every other decision that is made in this House?

Every time the Liberals do something, it is for politics, political reasons, and they do it with your money. The people out there who are hurting the most, the people who are struggling to get by in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, they're the ones who get stuck with the bills for his ill-considered decisions. They're the ones. So when we debate this bill, and any other bill in this House—and I say to the members across the way, when you go home to your ridings and you face those constituents in the eye and they ask you how we got here, how we got to the point where we can spend \$190 million for no other reason but to buy the seats in Mississauga—that is an admission; they've admitted that. The Premier himself has not commented. He sent out the Minister of Energy. He sent out the messenger boys. But he has not commented on why a political party, in this day and age, could think it is right to take the people's money and spend it in that way. Is that what we have to look forward to in this province? Not under a Tim Hudak government. Those things won't happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, thank you very much. It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. You keep us very interested in what you have to say. There are a few things that the member did talk about which I agree with.

But first I want to highlight a couple of things I've been doing in my riding. I'm the seniors critic, and I hear from seniors a lot. The three things are on seniors' worry lists when you talk to seniors.

First of all is health care. They're worried about the health care we have in this province, and they're worried about the health care they are receiving in their homes. It's not enough for them. They need it to improve. They need more access to health care in their homes, especially rural seniors. That's one big issue.

The other issue they have is a pocketbook issue. As the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke pointed out, hydro is expensive. If you look at your hydro bill lately, especially with the summer we've had, the heat—it has been astronomically hot, and there has been a drought. People have had their air conditioning on. You're getting bills coming in at \$200 a month. Seniors can't afford to stay in their homes if they have those types of bills.

They're also worried, believe it or not, about jobs. A lot of my seniors are worried about the economy and how their children are going to keep their jobs and how their grandchildren are getting jobs, because a lot of their grandchildren can't find summer jobs, or they've graduated from university or college and can't find work.

So having this bill, the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, is a concern because they're worried about so many other things as opposed to spending \$10,000 that they don't have in order to stay in their homes. We have to do better with the pocketbook issues and affordable housing for seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I think it's very unfortunate, when we're discussing a bill and are hopefully trying to work together to improve the quality of life, in this case, of seniors who can and want to stay in their home, that it becomes so cynical, so partisan, so off-topic. Quite frankly, this discussion about bells and all that just shows that this bill, along with others, has taken so long to get to this point because of the delays.

The fact is, the Liberal Party is the government. We govern; that's what we do. So we have a comprehensive strategy to help seniors. Other parties have been in government before, and they know what it's like to govern. That's our job, but to work in co-operation with the other parties. That's why this bill went to committee; that's why it was reviewed in detail there, clause-by-clause consideration. Here we are now, ready to pass the bill, I hope.

I think it's all-important that we stay focused on what we're talking about here today. We're not talking about hydro bills explicitly. We're talking about seniors staying at home, a tax credit, a part of a bigger strategy. No, not

every senior will take advantage of this tax credit, and no, not every senior will spend \$10,000 on home renovations.

Mr. Mario Sergio: They don't have to.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Exactly. They don't have to.

The important thing to remember is that it helps seniors stay at home longer. It helps family members sharing a home with a senior get some tax relief. It benefits taxpayers by relieving pressure on long-term-care facilities. It supports 10,500 jobs per year and about \$800 million in home renovation tax credits. That's fantastic. If passed, effective October 1, 2011, senior homeowners and tenants will be able to make a claim for a refundable tax credit up to \$1,500 for expenses related to permanent modifications of their home. That's good news. I encourage everybody to get on board and—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has performed an important public service this morning: He has woken up the government benches. I think it's commendable, and I certainly want to compliment him on the speech that he gave this morning. It was one of the best speeches I think I've heard in this current provincial Parliament. He is a powerful voice for his constituents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, and that forceful and passionate manner he brings into this House is very effective in terms of representing his constituents. I think he is, indeed, one of the greatest orators in the House at present. He talked about a number of things, of course Bill 2, the subject before the House today, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit.

Of course, as we know, this bill was introduced almost a full year ago, and the government has only now gotten around to getting it to this point in the debate: third reading. We certainly question the management of the House from the perspective of the government House leader's ability to get bills through the House but certainly also whether or not this is a high priority for the government.

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As you know, Madam Speaker, when we discuss and debate finance bills—and this bill is brought forward in the name of the Minister of Finance—there's usually a greater degree of latitude in terms of the debate.

I'm glad that the member did make reference to the \$190-million penalty that the provincial government is going to be paying for its decision—its crass political decision, I would add, just before the provincial election was called—to cancel the Mississauga gas-fired electricity plant that was proposed for that community in order to placate the voters in a number of seats around the Mississauga area.

That was one of the most cynical political decisions that I've ever seen in the 22 years that I've served in this Legislature, by any government. I think that the people of Ontario are outraged when they hear about it, and I think it's important that members of the Legislature respond to

it. Certainly, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke did a great job outlining—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I just want to commend the member from Nipissing–Pembroke for his passionate speech, but then again, I love the diversity in this House. We go from that to a calm, cool, collected approach by our member from London–Fanshawe, which was a nice mix.

I'll say one thing: The member from Pembroke did hit on one thing about bills that give a little bit. I'll give you a perfect example of what can compare to Bill 2, which is the \$50 sports grant that the government came out with last year—\$50 per family for sports equipment or sports registration.

Frankly, Speaker, that's a joke. I mean, I might be able to sharpen my skates six times for 50 bucks if I'm lucky. It's not doing anything for the kid that can't afford registration in the first place. A lot of our local clubs help out kids that can't afford to register, and they help out the families with that. So that was actually, to me, an insult—\$50. What am I going to do with \$50? That was one example of a fluff bill that's done for political gain, and now we've got another one here for the \$10,000.

They mentioned the 380,000 people that it's going to help in Ontario. Is that the total number of seniors in Ontario? I don't think so. And what demographic group does that represent? Does that represent people that can afford \$10,000, or people that can't? I'm thinking it's the people that can. I'm sure there are more than 380,000 seniors in Ontario, with 14 million people or close to it.

Once again, as the member said, they're appealing to a certain group to get votes. Usually, the ones in that group have a tendency to vote, more so than other people. So they're targeting a special group that votes, and that really is sad. So I can safely say, once again, it's about votes, it's about saving seats. It's not really for the people out there.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members for London–Fanshawe, Pickering–Scarborough East, Wellington–Halton Hills, and of course, my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I just want to talk for a second about what the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said about this rebate for hockey—50 bucks. The price of ice time's going up all over the place. What is the number one reason why the price of ice time is going up?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Energy.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to my friend from Nipissing that, as he knows, it's the cost of energy—power. And who has driven up the price of power more than anyone in the history of Ontario?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Dalton McGuinty.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Dalton McGuinty. And now he wants you to come up with another \$190 million for the Mississauga fiasco, the Sousa centre, now defunct. The

building of the Sousa centre has been cancelled. And what's it going to cost for the Oakville power plant?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm asking the member to come back to Bill 2.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was just speaking on the comments of other members, but I guess I won't address them, then. I'll just go to the bill.

Mr. Paul Miller: There's so little—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, yes, there wasn't a whole lot of substance there for some of them, but I did like what the member for Wellington–Halton Hills had to say, I must say, Madam Speaker. It was wonderful—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: So accurate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, and so accurate.

Anyway, again, it speaks to the cynicism that people have for this House and the people who occupy it. That's one of the dangerous things in politics today: how people view the members of this Legislature. Behaviour like what's going on on the other side, these kinds of cynical bills that are being put forward, only adds to the problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and welcome back. It's a pleasure and it's an honour, always, to stand in this House, and in particular to stand and to speak on behalf of seniors, because somebody has to. It's a little sunnier on the other side of this House. I listened intently to the words from the member from Pickering–Scarborough East, but I'd like to challenge her on some of the facts.

First of all, the figures: It's going to create 10,000 jobs? I'd love to see the proof. It's going to cost the government \$800 million? I'd love to see the take-up. Because quite frankly, there are two reasons why seniors do not stay in their homes, and these are well-documented, factual reasons. One is the expense of keeping it up, and that can be heating, as we've heard; it can be hydro, as we've heard; it can be property taxes. It's keeping up the home—and most of my seniors leave their homes because of that. Number two is because they need assistance to stay in their homes. It's not about widening hallways; it's not about ramps. It's about somebody to help you do the shopping, somebody to clean the leaves out of the gutters, somebody to mow the lawn. That's what seniors need and that's what drives them from their homes. Considering that almost half of seniors have a disability, that assistance becomes even more pre-eminent. This bill does absolutely nothing for those two reasons. It's not going to keep seniors in their homes. It's not going to work. If that's the reason, the reason is faulty.

We've also heard that you don't have to spend \$10,000 to collect the \$1,500 back, but the reality is, what can you get done for a couple of hundred? Even if you only spend that, you have to put the money up front and you have to wait for the money to come back at tax time. Seniors do not have even a few hundred dollars up front. Why, Madam Speaker? This is why: Almost one in 10 seniors in our province who are female live in poverty. They have a hard time feeding themselves,

paying the rent and paying the property taxes, never mind making modifications and upgrades to their homes. One in 20 seniors who are male live in poverty. The same goes for them. They can't afford anything extra.

I'd just like to correct my friend from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, however, about the hydro costs. In fact, the reason that hydro is so high in this province is that both the Conservative and the Liberal parties have wantonly gone down the road of nuclear energy and have put our money into nuclear. The cost overruns in nuclear are now hitting our seniors in their pocketbooks. But also, of course, it's the HST, which is what this Liberal government brought in. That's hurting seniors. We voted in this House to take it off home heating, but that hasn't happened.

Now, if you want to see a program that does actually help seniors, you don't have to look far. You look next door to Quebec. There they have a refundable \$3,500 for low-income seniors. They're the ones who need it, Madam Speaker. The people, as we've heard, who are going to Florida every winter, who can afford \$10,000 up front, don't need our help. The seniors who need our help are the people who are living in poverty, and the people who are living in poverty don't have the money to put up front. In Quebec, they get that \$3,500 if they're low-income. That works. That's smart. That's what we need here, and that's the kind of program that would actually help seniors.

Let me tell you the story of a senior in my riding, a classic story. This is a woman who owned her own home. She had to leave it. Why? Not for financial reasons, but because she didn't have assistance. She was suffering from early-onset dementia and she couldn't stay in her home, so she went into a long-term-care facility. It was a good one. But good long-term-care facilities cost a lot of money. They cost so much money that there's a new breed of seniors now who go on cruises permanently. They get carried off them, quite literally, because it's cheaper to go on a cruise than it is to go into long-term care. That's how bad it is in Ontario. It's cheaper to put yourself on a boat and start circling the world than it is to actually go into long-term care, where people will provide you with care day in and day out if you have something like Alzheimer's or early-onset or dementia, where you need that kind of care. This is the Ontario we live in.

1010

So what happened to my friend? She goes into long-term care and guess what? Because she's paying thousands of dollars every month, she not only pays the interest on the house that she sold, and she owned it outright, but she's paying the principal. Guess what? She lives too long. What a fate should befall us that we outlive our money. That's what happens to seniors too, because the longer we live, we live outside the bounds of what we can save for in any program that we have, including selling our homes. So what happened? She moved from the good long-term-care home into the not-so-good long-term-care home, where she didn't have a private room, where she had to share a room with another woman with dementia, where the care wasn't as good.

And guess what? She died shortly thereafter. That's the life of a senior in this province. And lest we forget, these are the people who built this province. These are our grandparents; these are our parents; these are the people who sacrificed day in and day out, who paid for the roads, who paid for the infrastructure, who paid for the health care system. These are the people who we are now ignoring.

This government is ignoring our senior population, and this bill, Bill 2, is window dressing. It's not going to help anybody. I'd love to see how many seniors take this bill up and what their incomes are, because it's not going to be a low-income senior. It's not going to be seniors in my riding who I'm hearing from. They're not going to take advantage of this bill. They're not going to because they can't afford it. They simply can't afford to take advantage.

And where are these jobs? I'd love to see the proof, Madam Speaker. The government's great about throwing these figures out. "Some \$800 million we're going to spend; 10,000 jobs we're going to create." Where? Show me the proof. I'd love to see the proof.

There are other jurisdictions who do it better, way better than even Quebec. Let me tell you about one. I travelled there. Because remember, coming back to my first point, there are two reasons that seniors move out of their homes. Number one is money; they can't afford to keep paying the property taxes, the heating, the hydro. Number two is they need assistance. They don't need wider hallways; they need someone to help them, just doing the menial stuff sometimes, somebody to come in. We could talk about how we've completely gutted that system too, Madam Speaker, but let's leave it for a minute.

What have they done in some Scandinavian countries? Sweden, for example: Let's look at what they do for their seniors. In Sweden, if you have a relative with dementia or Alzheimer's or a disability that means they need your help, and you're a relative—because guess what? 68% of some % of the people who help seniors are relatives. What have they done? They've said, "We'll train your relative. If you want to look after them, we'll send you on a training course. We'll get you into a union, a good union job. We'll get you into a union. We'll train you, we'll supervise you and we'll pay you." And guess what? It's cheaper than institutionalizing, it's cheaper than long-term care and it's better, because it's a person who loves you, who wants to work with you, who's doing it anyway. They're doing it anyway in Ontario. They're doing it for free.

When we're talking about the needs of seniors, we're also talking about the needs of their caregivers, because that's a crisis too—the crisis in caring for people who want to stay in their homes. It's a crisis for those who work in those homes, who are paid many times less than minimum wage by the time they travel back and forth. It's a crisis for relatives, who set aside their own dreams, their own desires, their own work, their own families—the sandwich generation; we've heard about them so

often—to care for their seniors, because nobody else will and the seniors can't afford to pay somebody to do that day in and night out.

Could we do it better? One thousand percent better. Will this bill help? Not one iota. You spend a few hundred dollars and you get \$30 back or something at tax time. Oh, that's going to change the poverty rates. That's going to change the Alzheimer's situation. That's going to change the fact that our long-term-care beds don't keep up with the need and the fact that people who work there get ripped off day by day. That's going to change that not one iota.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We've reached 10:15.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been a pleasure and I look forward to speaking more about it.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

This House stands recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would like to take this opportunity to introduce a former member of this Legislature, Mr. Jim Brownell, the former member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. Welcome.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Kate Julien, formerly of my office, who is actually leaving my staff to go to law school. We welcome her back. Even though she's left the place, she's come back for a visit today.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to welcome students from Scarborough–Agincourt: Akehil, Sarah, Raha, Nancy and Mary. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Peter Tabors: Speaker, it gives me pleasure to welcome Romeo Tello from my riding, attending today. Thank you, Romeo.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for introducing former MPP Jim Brownell. He also has a guest with him: Mr. Gerry Benson from Cornwall, who I'd like to welcome as well to Queen's Park.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce—and I think he enjoyed us so much yesterday, he's back again today—my good friend Craig Brockwell from the teachers' federation. Welcome, Craig.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, the Ontario PC caucus has been able to drag you, sometimes kicking and screaming but drag you nonetheless,

to a partial wage freeze for teachers. The question is, now, what do we do next?

Yesterday I asked you why you have a pay freeze for teachers but not for CUPE power workers getting almost a 9% wage increase. Your answer seemed to be, "Well, it's constitutional for teachers but it's unconstitutional for everyone else." I don't think people actually believe that argument.

Let me try something else, though, Premier. You have given 98% of bureaucrats bonus pay increases who are supposed to have their wages frozen. Will you agree to the PC caucus call to end the McGuinty loophole, close it up and take away those bonuses that are becoming nothing more than another Dalton McGuinty giveaway?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to start by reassuring my honourable colleague that in the matter of his support for our bill, which is designed to ensure that we protect progress in our schools and achieve our fiscal targets, I will defend this gentleman in that particular context and provide him with that reassurance.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, that on the matter of pay for performance, my honourable colleague will want to recall that he was at the cabinet table when they put in place that particular measure. We think it is less than satisfactory. That's why we've undertaken to re-examine that. If my honourable colleague has any specific recommendations, we would be most welcome to receive those.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Premier, you know that performance pay began as something to reward those hardest-working bureaucrats who save taxpayers money. It was a small, select group, the best of the best, but under his leadership, it's mutated into—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Peterborough, would you come to order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —free giveaway of taxpayer dollars: 98% got performance pay increases. And Premier, I remind you, this comes directly from a loophole you created in your public restraint act, subsection 8(3). Sir, you crafted this loophole and gave 98% of bureaucrats bonus pay increases.

Please help us understand how you can deal seriously and try to get wage freezes on one hand, because I don't think you're being serious enough, and give away 98% bonuses to civil servants who are supposed to have their wages frozen. Isn't the right thing to do to follow the PC plan, close this loophole completely, and an across-the-board pay freeze for all of us?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we've made it perfectly clear that the system that was developed by the PC government is unacceptable, and we're going to have to make some changes to that. If my honourable colleague has any specific recommendations in that regard, we would be most interested in receiving those—something that goes beyond the rhetoric, ideally.

But I want to reassure Ontarians that I've asked my Minister of Finance to take a very close look at this.

We'll be eager to hear from all parties and all members with respect to what we need to do to ensure we have a fair system of remuneration in place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you've dug us into a \$30-billion hole. The last 10 months have been wasted with more spending, no serious efforts to try to reduce the size and cost of government, and you turned what was supposed to be an incentive program for the best of the best into a general entitlement for everyone. Ninety-eight per cent of bureaucrats got bonus pay. That defies the definition—that defies rationality.

You, sir, just asked for my recommendation: End it. Close the loophole. Make it no more. Put a stop to it. Will you do the right thing and end the McGuinty loophole that gave 98% pay increases?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I choose—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I choose to interpret the enthusiasm that characterizes my honourable colleague's intervention in this matter as a strong denunciation—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean—Carleton, your leader asked a question and I think your party would like to have the answer. I'd like to have a little bit of quiet. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague and I are on common ground when we both choose to denounce the policies originally put in place by the PC government at a cabinet table at which my honourable colleague in fact sat. I don't think we want to defend that particular policy. We need to acknowledge its inadequacy, and I think we need to work together to put in place something that is more fair for all concerned.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I had hoped the Premier agreeing to what the PC Party had called for—a wage freeze, even a partial wage freeze on teachers—may have been a sign that he was actually starting to take things seriously, that maybe he had listened to the personal conversation he and I had back in November and since. But sadly, this looks more like a conversion of convenience.

Premier, this should be a no-brainer. This is basic. This is absolutely elementary. You created a loophole in your act, the public restraint act, subsection 8(3), that allows for 98% of bureaucrats to get bonuses that were supposed to be frozen. How can you negotiate seriously at the table in achieving any further wage freezes?

The question is, where do we go next? The Ontario PC caucus says an across-the-board wage freeze, a spending freeze, no more spending programs and close this loophole. Premier, no more waffling. Do the right thing.

Close the McGuinty loophole and cut out these 98% bonus pay increases.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Sit down.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm, again, with which my honourable colleague puts his questions, but I want to remind him yet again that we're talking about a policy that was put in place by the PC government. We've all acknowledged its inadequacy, Speaker. It is no longer suitable. I think we need to find a way to work together to improve it and put in place a remuneration system that is fair to both taxpayers and people working within the public sector.

I think we're on common ground there, Speaker, and I'd ask my honourable colleague to find a way to introduce some specific measures that we might acknowledge and to work with the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, the Premier's quoted in today's National Post saying the following: "We can't do what we did for the past nine years." Dalton McGuinty—

Interjections.

1040

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member of Peterborough come to order, please.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —of course referring to the pay increases he's given to teachers. A very fair point; I agree with the Premier on this. You gave away too much. You gave away the store, a 30% pay increase, threw money at every problem under the sun, and didn't get results in return. We've dragged you kicking and screaming to agreeing to at least a partial wage freeze. The question, Premier: Is this a conversion of convenience or are you going to get serious about the problems?

Since then we've seen \$190 million blown on moving a gas plant, continuing scandals at Ornge, 98% of bureaucrats getting pay increases when they're supposed to be frozen. The path ahead: Freeze spending, freeze wages, no more increases, no more sliding backwards. Get serious about the situation, Premier. Is this convenience? Is it a newfound religion? Do the right thing: Close the loophole and freeze spending across the board.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the heat but I think Ontarians would more appreciate a little bit of light on this subject and I'll try to shed a little bit more on it now.

This program was created in 1996. It was expanded in 2001 and 2002. What we have done in fact is frozen the pool that's available for pay-for-performance, and we've reduced it in size now so that it's the same size today as it was back in 2003, just so we're clear as to the reality of this matter.

Again, I say to my honourable colleague that we no longer are prepared to accept this deficient PC policy and

we need to work together to ensure that it's fair for all concerned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, over nine years, you've turned what was supposed to be an incentive for the best of the best into a freebie, another Liberal giveaway where 98% got a backdoor wage increase.

I ask a straightforward question, "Will you close the McGuinty loophole?" and I get this waffling, Speaker. He's going to look at it. He's going to study it; he's going to examine it. He's going to pursue his options. Sir, there are no options. Close the loophole and freeze spending—an across-the-board wage freeze. We had hoped that you had finally gotten that the province is in a substantial hole. It's time to take a different course, one that will grow the economy and reduce spending.

Premier, I'll ask you again: Will you close the loophole as part of an across-the-board wage freeze and freeze spending where it is? No more increases. No more runways. Put down the shovel. The hole is deep enough. Will you do the right thing, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I hear what my honourable colleague is saying, but what I understand is a reckless head-on rush to close hospitals, close schools, fire teachers, lay off nurses. That's not an approach that we're prepared to adopt on this side of the House. I think we have a responsibility to be thoughtful. I appreciate the volume that characterizes my honourable colleague's interventions on this matter, but we will remain, nonetheless, thoughtful. We would denounce that particular policy put in place by the PC government. We will improve it and put something in place that is fair to all concerned.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Premier: Just a few weeks ago, the Premier denounced a plan by the Conservatives to impose contracts on public servants as "simplistic and unconstitutional and certain to be overturned by the courts." Now he's working with the Conservatives to do exactly that. Has the Constitution changed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague. It's a little bit complicated, but it's worth making the effort to try to understand. I'd ask my honourable colleague to acknowledge the facts connected with what we are doing which led up to the evolution and introduction of the bill which is the subject of his question.

It started some six months ago. We sat down with our teachers' federations. We engaged in a sincere, genuine and determined effort to achieve a negotiated resolution. We did that with 55,000 teachers. So we have made a strong, concerted, determined and deliberate effort to achieve a negotiated settlement. But we are in fact running out of runway. So we've laid down a good founda-

tion of negotiations. Now it comes time for us to introduce a bill, and that's what we're doing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Premier needs to know that constitutional experts are saying that the government has it wrong. As one law professor noted, "The fact that you've simply bargained for six months—or any period of time—isn't the case law." She went on to guess that the government likely doesn't care. In two to four years, when the consequences are felt and have to be dealt with, perhaps by another government, it doesn't matter to them.

Why should parents believe that this isn't yet another case of the government playing short-term politics that leaves us with an extended long-term and expensive mess?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think it's perfectly clear that the NDP believe, at this point in time, at this point in our economic history, notwithstanding our challenging fiscal circumstances, that Ontario teachers should be given a pay hike at this point in time. We can't afford that right now. We're not prepared to do that, and I think teachers understand that. That's why 55,000 Ontario teachers have signed on to the road map that we've worked long and hard to negotiate. So we see the world differently.

I'm proud of the fact that we've hired 13,000 new teachers. I'm proud of the fact that we have lowered class sizes, proud of the fact that we've hired 10,000 more support staff, proud of the fact that we have more teachers for art, phys ed and those kinds of programs. The purpose of the bill is to protect those programs, protect our progress and protect all those jobs for Ontario teachers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I think most people understand the purpose of the bill is to win by-election seats. That's what we're talking about.

This isn't the first time we've seen this government do whatever it takes to win power for themselves. Families across Ontario are now paying the \$190 million that the government risked when it moved to save seats in Mississauga and Etobicoke. Now, the government is willing to waste millions more and create conflict for kids in our classrooms.

Is the government ready to stop playing politics and work to get a solution that actually works for students, their parents and a public that's fed up with paying the price for this government's quest for a majority?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague of a quote that he offered on September 26, 2011, in connection with the Mississauga gas plant. He said, quite simply, "We wouldn't build it." I want to acknowledge his support for this.

Again, I want to speak to our record of support for publicly funded education in Ontario. In addition to those 13,630 new teachers, in addition to lowering class sizes and hiring 10,000 more support staff, we've offered

teachers more prep time. We've put in place already more professional development days. We introduced the Premier's Awards for Teaching Excellence, Speaker, to recognize excellence that takes place in our classrooms every single day. Tens of thousands of teachers have benefited from the many professional learning opportunities offered by the literacy and numeracy secretariat.

That is a small sampling of the facts when it comes to our commitment to teaching and excellence in all of our schools in Ontario.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, again to the Premier: In 2003, this Premier, then in opposition, stood in the House and spoke to government plans to impose contracts, saying, "This has nothing to do with returning ... kids to their classroom. It has everything to do with political opportunism and preparing themselves to go into the next election." He went on to say, "[Y]ou can't legislate goodwill and legislate respect." What changed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I find it interesting that the NDP had no education platform in the last election. I would gladly put our record of achievement, our record of co-operative good will, our record of progress inside publicly funded schools up against theirs any day.

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I would encourage my honourable colleague to simply reconcile himself to the fact that that party believes that it's right and appropriate and fair to all concerned that we give teachers a pay hike today. I'm saying we can't afford to do that, not right now. We've increased their pay during the course of the past nine years. Right now, we need to hit the pause button. We need to ensure that any money available for education goes into full-day kindergarten, goes into smaller classes, goes into progress with test scores and grad rates. That's the choice we're making on behalf of Ontario families, and I believe that's a decision supported by Ontario teachers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Always amusing.

The reality is that this government has completely reversed itself so many times that nobody can tell what they believe anymore. The government that denounced Conservative wage plans as unconstitutional, certain to cost millions in the long run, is now working with the Conservatives to risk just that. The government that promised to put kids in the classroom first has thrown that away in the hopes of picking up seats in the Legislature.

Why should parents believe that the Premier has a plan for our schools when he's engaging in the sort of politics he used to denounce?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I always appreciate the opportunity to converse with my honourable colleague.

I think it's important to make it as clear as I can with respect to the distinction in terms of the position that we've adopted in this matter. We can't afford to give

teachers a pay hike at this point in time. My honourable colleagues in the NDP want to give teachers a pay hike in 2012. We can't afford to do so. We've got to make some choices. The choice we make is that any money we have that's available for education will go into continuing to roll out full-day kindergarten so it's available for 250,000 of our youngest learners—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would repeat the same thing to the members of the NDP caucus. You asked the question. You may not like the answer, but I'd ask you to listen to the answer.

Continue, Premier.

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it was for me.

Speaker, the NDP believe that we should be giving teachers a pay hike; we don't. We think the money that's available—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: If they don't think teachers should be getting an increase in pay, then they should go out there and say that. Go out on the front lawn today and say that: They're not going to get an increase in pay.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sit down, please. Order, please.

Supplementary?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek come to order, please. This is the last warning.

Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the Premier made it clear yesterday what his priorities were when his first act of a recalled Legislature was to hit the campaign trail in Kitchener—Waterloo. He thinks he can fool voters with a divisive and risky plan, a plan he knows won't work. I don't think people are going to be fooled.

When will the Premier stop playing politics and work to get a solution that actually works for kids in the classroom?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: So we're clear, they don't want us to do anything with respect to the ONTC. They don't want us to touch the subsidy for horse racing in Ontario. They want to give teachers a pay hike in Ontario. They want to give doctors a pay hike in Ontario.

This represents the height of irresponsibility. We have to act responsibly in government. The times have changed, and so must we. We must make decisions that support health care, that support education. We've got to do so in a way that also meets the needs of Ontario families. That's what we're going to keep doing.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

This summer, our party used every means available to get to the truth about cancelling the Mississauga power

plant. Finally, after hiding behind the pages of a lawsuit, the minister announced the shocking news: The Liberals spent \$180 million. Only a few days later, his colleague corrected the number, announcing it's really \$190 million. "Honest; we mean it this time."

There are 600,000 unemployed men and women in Ontario. Minister, can you please tell those 600,000 people how spending \$190 million and getting nothing in return, not even one megawatt of power, is helping them get back to work this morning?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Those who are looking for work in the province of Ontario are always our first priority. That's why we've made sure that there's enough electricity for reliable generation in the province of Ontario. There wasn't when they left office in 2003. That's why we reformed the tax system, to make sure we supported job creation in this province. They voted against it. That's why we decreased the amount of tax on investment for manufacturing equipment. They voted against it. That's why we've supported the southwest economic development fund. They voted against it.

The only thing they supported was the cancellation of the gas plant, which now they're trying to reconcile from—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: We know now the damage in Mississauga. Yesterday my colleague from Cambridge had to call for the minister to be found in contempt of the Legislature because he still hasn't turned over the Oakville power plant documents. Imagine that, Speaker. What is this government hiding? Just how bad is the bill going to be for Oakville? The opening ante is \$300 million, but will it exceed \$1 billion, as many insiders are suggesting?

Minister, the 600,000 unemployed in Ontario deserve better. They deserve an answer from you. In fact, your fellow parliamentarians deserve an answer from you. Will you today provide this House with the cost of cancelling the Oakville power plant?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm reminded that we have a vote on the southwest economic development fund right after question period.

What we said from the beginning—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Once again, if you ask a question, I ask you to listen to the answer. If the noise continues at the level it is, I can't hear the answer, so, please, order.

Minister?

Interjection.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What we said from the beginning, when we became the government, and—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, I just stood up and asked for order, and I didn't have a chance to even hit my seat and you were at it again.

Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What we said from the beginning, as we proceeded to implement the commitment we made with respect to the gas plant, is that as soon as we had more to say about the issue, we would immediately tell the people what that was.

We did not conclude those confidential discussions until the Monday—I believe July 10—and the day after, we were out there with documents and with numbers, talking about the relocation of the plant to Sarnia-Lambton. That's the position we've taken consistently.

Now, I know there's a motion before the House, and I know the Speaker has it, and we'll await the Speaker's ruling as we reconcile the competing interests here, and the public interest, which we've always stood to defend.

COMMITTEE WITNESSES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Tomorrow, the Ornge hearings at the public accounts committee will resume. MPPs on the committee must be allowed to get to the bottom of what really happened at Ornge. But after a witness who appeared before this committee was swiftly suspended from his job at Ornge, many are wondering if this can actually happen.

Why is this government allowing witnesses to be intimidated and preventing the committee from getting to the bottom of this scandal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

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Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question, and of course we support the work of the committee. I've had the pleasure of appearing not once, not twice, but three times before the committee. I know you've heard from many, many witnesses, and I know that the people who are sitting on that committee have a lot of good advice to give us. It's very important that we continue to do the rebuilding at Ornge. We need to pass Bill 50. If the member opposite really is interested in moving Ornge forward, let's pass Bill 50. Let's get the recommendations from the committee. We've got work to do. The people of this province deserve no less.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I have to reiterate. The concern is that the committee has to do its work. Why is this government allowing witnesses to be intimidated? Witnesses who appear at committee should not be threatened with reprisals. The Premier and the minister have all talked about all the change at Ornge. They've talked about the change and what's going on at Ornge.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the Minister of Energy come to order, please?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: When we hear about suspensions dealt out to the very people who are appearing at the committee to assist us with getting to the bottom, with getting to the truth, it doesn't seem like this is the case. It does not seem like there is actual change here at Ornge.

Can the Premier or the minister provide assurances to the committee, assurances to this Legislative Assembly, assurances to Ontarians that those who testify at committees will not face repercussions for simply telling the truth?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I know that the public accounts committee has worked hard over the summer. I'm told that there have been 54 witnesses who have appeared before the committees; over 75 hours of hearings. Do we need the recommendations from that committee.

We've done a lot of work. We've got new leadership, and we're moving forward. But we need the opposition to complete the job. We need the support for Bill 50, which includes whistle-blower protection. We need the support of the opposition to pass Bill 50. We need those recommendations from the committee. I think the people of this province want to see progress at Ornge. They're seeing that; let's finish the job with those two pieces.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, this House has been recalled to address the proposed Putting Students First Act. The government has asked teachers to take a pause in their pay. Some unions walked away from discussions with the government. ETFO, the public elementary teachers, left the provincial discussion table after only one hour. Now unions have threatened to take the government to court over the proposed act. Minister, I've heard concerns from my constituents and in this House about the constitutionality of this bill. Can you please tell the House if the legislation is constitutional?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you to the member for Windsor West. Mr. Speaker, we didn't take the decision to introduce the legislation lightly. But after six months of working with our partners in education, we feel that we need to act in the best interests of students, and we made the decision to introduce legislation.

If this bill is passed and then challenged in court, the government's position will be that it is constitutional, that we have respected the constitutionally protected right to a process of collective bargaining, and that in any event, under the Charter of Rights, the bill is both reasonable and justified in all the circumstances.

The proposed bill ensures that compensation within our education system, a \$17-billion public sector wage bill every year, which represents 85% of education spending, responsibly and fairly accords with the fiscal parameters as laid out in the 2012 budget. More importantly, it ensures that the gains that we've made over the past nine years in the classroom experience for students are protected.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Minister. Speaker, my supplementary is also for the Minister of Education. As a member of this House, I recognize that this govern-

ment has weathered the worst recession in a generation better than most jurisdictions. I also recognize that this government is making tough choices to protect education in Ontario because our students are our future. But, Minister, I've heard the third party say that there's a court case out of British Columbia that would indicate that the proposed Putting Students First Act is unconstitutional. Could you please tell the House: Is this true?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have a chance to speak to this issue, Speaker, because there are some significant differences between the situation in the BC case and what's happening here in Ontario. In British Columbia, the government gave 20 minutes' notice to the unions that they were changing the collective agreement, and as a consequence they were subject to a Supreme Court ruling which found that they did not respect the constitutionally protected right to the process of consultation and consideration in good faith.

In Ontario, we've been at the table in discussions since February, and we've been clear about the challenges we need to meet together. We've reached agreements with teachers in over half of the boards in the province—OECTA and AEFO, who together represent 55,000 teachers. We're not closing the door on negotiated settlements. There's still time to negotiate deals, even under the legislation, if passed. The parties do have scope to negotiate collective agreements.

But I would encourage the members opposite to pick up the BC case and have a read through the BC case, because when they do, they will find the following words: "There was no meaningful consultation with unions before it became law." They gave them 20 minutes' notice. This is a very different situation than the road that we have taken here in Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Nine years of Liberal scandal, waste and fiscal incompetence has left Ontario finances in shambles as we speed towards a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt. We're here this week, Speaker, because the education minister bungled negotiations with educators, and now the Ontario PCs have to bail her out. Now you're caught in the shameful decision by the Liberal campaign team to put political interests ahead of the public good by cancelling the Mississauga and Oakville power plants. In desperation, the campaign ordered hundreds of millions of hard-earned taxpayers' dollars to be thrown down the drain to save Liberal seats.

Minister, how can you defend the indefensible by not coming clean with this House and the people of Ontario on who made those decisions, when they made them and how much they're going to cost the taxpayers of Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I might have missed something, but the cancellation of Mississauga was a decision they supported, in fact the very same day. What we said from the beginning was, as we conducted very delicate negotiations, before they reached a conclusion, it

was not in the public interest to speak in detail about those negotiations or where they were at, until they reached the conclusion. I spoke to them right after we reached a conclusion.

I remember the eight-year journey. I remember the lights went out in 2003; I remember we didn't have enough power; I remember we inherited a deficit when they said there was a balanced budget. We remember where we were, and in energy we remember where we are: the hottest three months in history, and we had enough power and the lights didn't go out.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister. Minister, you know how this is going to play out. We've seen it over and over, most recently with the Minister of Health, who stood up day after day, ultimately losing all credibility, as the facts on the Ornge scandal came out. Is this really where you want to go? Do you really want your legacy to be that you're going to withhold facts because of client-solicitor privilege? We all know that that doesn't belong and that doesn't apply to this House.

Minister, you won't release the information, so I'm going to ask you: What's worse? Deciding to sacrifice hundreds of millions of dollars on political expediency or feeding the growing cynicism Ontarians feel about politics by blindly defending a government that will do or say anything to get elected?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We've always been acting in the public interest. We listened to the public in cancelling and committing to relocate, negotiating on behalf of the public, in private, to get the best result. We were able to relocate. It was a decision supported by the PCs during and after the campaign. What I've said with respect to all issues is that it is in the public interest that negotiations, delicate as they are, be conducted in private. That issue is before the Speaker, and the Speaker will make the decision and we'll abide by the decision. It's always in the public interest. There was a lot of discussion about that yesterday, and it's the Speaker's position to resolve that.

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But it's also in the public interest that we support the southwest economic development fund, and I happen to have a letter here from the mayor of Kitchener, asking that Bill 11 be supported. It's obviously in the interests of that city and that region to support, and we hope you'll do that in the public interest.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, you know that the largest project to be undertaken in northern Ontario, when it comes to mining, is potentially the Ring of Fire projects. Can you confirm if you're in any way in discussions with Cliffs resources to sign a ministerial permit allowing ore to be shipped out of Canada?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We are very, very excited about the Ring of Fire. There are several aspects that the government is speaking to Cliffs about, which will be no surprise to the member from Timmins-James Bay, because we were very, very excited. I think members on both sides of the House were very, very excited when Cliffs decided that they were going to build their processing plant in Ontario.

So we look forward to the potential that the Ring of Fire will bring to I think everyone in Ontario, in particular northern Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Wow! We are so excited with that answer, we're beside ourselves. My Lord.

I asked you a very simple question, Minister, a very simple question: Are you, yes or no, in discussions with Cliffs resources to sign a ministerial permit allowing the shipping of raw chromite out of Canada? Yes or no? That's all I want to know.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Well, you know what? Maybe the member from Timmins-James Bay isn't excited about the Ring of Fire, but I can tell you that everybody else in northern Ontario is very, very excited. In fact, the mayor of Timmins is very, very excited. He's looking for the opportunity that this very exciting project will bring to the people of northern Ontario.

We look at the job creation opportunity. We look at the spinoff benefits of the supply and services sector with regard to the Ring of Fire. We look at the investment, the infrastructure investment, that's naturally going to take place from the Ring of Fire. We look at the additional mines that will come on board. We look at the opportunity for our First Nations.

To say that he isn't excited about the Ring of Fire certainly isn't reflective of what the people of northern Ontario—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

JOB CREATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation. This summer I spent a great deal of time speaking to my constituents in Guelph about our economy. It's clear from them that the economic recovery remains their top priority. Thankfully, the McGuinty government has a strong plan to balance the budget and continue to take the necessary steps to keep our economy on track. I'm proud that our government is taking the needed steps to lead us through these tough economic times, allowing us to balance the budget while protecting health care and education.

Guelph has bounced back with jobs in the auto sector and the green energy sector, but my constituents are still nervous, given the world economy. They still want to know how we will support job creation and economic growth. Speaker, through you to the minister, how has Ontario fared in job creation thus far?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Our economy is steadily recovering from the global recession. We're creating jobs. In June and July combined, Ontario created 30,000 new jobs. In total, we've now created 350,000 net new jobs since the recessionary low in 2009. We've steadily been outpacing the UK, the US and all Great Lake states when it comes to job creation since 2009.

Our government has created the right climate for business investments by reducing corporate taxes, by investing in building the best-educated and best-trained workforce in the world and by fostering a climate for research and innovation. That's why companies continue to invest in Ontario.

While we're heading in the right direction, we recognize there's still more work to do. We'll continue to fight on behalf of Ontarians to create jobs and keep this economy on the right track.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: As more and more jobs are created and retained here, there is a real sense that Ontario is catching steam, yet there are still many people unemployed in southwestern Ontario. My constituency office still receives phone calls from people, young and old, who are looking for work. The people of Guelph want to know what further steps can be taken. They want to know what we are doing specifically in southwestern Ontario.

Speaker, I'm glad that the minister has acknowledged that there is more work to be done, but, through you to the minister, I would like to ask: What is the most important thing this government can do in the short term to continue this positive trend and get the people of southwestern Ontario back to work?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Later on today, this Legislature will have before it Bill 11. That bill will make permanent the eastern Ontario development fund and create the southwestern Ontario development fund to create jobs throughout southwestern Ontario and eastern Ontario.

Many of us just came from AMO last week, and I've got to tell you what municipal leaders have been saying right across this province, from the city of Kitchener, through to the town of Norfolk, through the towns of London and Windsor. They've been saying that the PCs should be supporting this legislation.

But it's one thing for them to oppose the bill. It's quite another for them to have deliberately delayed the bill. Those dollars could have been flowing into southwestern Ontario today, in August, but they're not, because those guys on the other side deliberately delayed this legislation.

They can make amends today, this afternoon, by supporting us, by supporting Bill 11, by supporting jobs in southwestern Ontario and eastern Ontario.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question today is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, your colleague the Minister of Finance corrected you on July 16 and said that the true cost to cancel the Mississauga gas plant will come in at

approximately \$190 million. To break that down for you, that's about \$47.5 million per Liberal member whose seat was saved by the relocation of the Mississauga gas plant, all on the backs of Ontario taxpayers.

Minister, now that we know the true cost of the four Liberal seats in Mississauga, will you do the honourable thing and reveal the true cost of the Oakville seat?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As we'd said for some months as we implemented the campaign commitment that we made—the same commitment the PCs made—we said that it was in the public interest to conduct the negotiations and discussions—very delicate—in private, and that's what we did. As soon as we reached a conclusion, where the costs were finalized, we went out there with the numbers for everybody to see—lots of commentary about the numbers.

Now, I haven't heard from the PCs what their calculations on the costs were when they made the same commitment on exactly the same day, but it would probably be interesting to compare and contrast. As we continue the discussions about Oakville, as soon as they reach a conclusion, I've said all along that we will go out with the numbers. But that issue is before the Speaker. We should let the Speaker make a ruling so that we can properly assess the public interest.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Minister, the taxpayers aren't fooled by your seat-saver programs any longer. Another example of mismanagement is Trillium Power Wind. That company is suing your government for \$2.25 billion over your announcement to cancel the offshore wind turbine development slated to be in the ridings of two of your ministers.

Minister, I must say, the Liberals are fetching quite a price these days in terms of saving their seats. But in court, Trillium says the decision was made in bad faith, as your government sought to save the seats of cabinet ministers in both Scarborough and Windsor. They were being threatened by the wind projects in their backyards during the run-up to last fall's election.

Minister, this makes zero economic sense. At what point did it become Liberal policy to forgo fact-based science—underscore that “fact”—in favour of political science?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: So just to be clear, the Tories are now in favour of wind power. Is that the situation?

The Tories supported cancelling the plant in Mississauga. They said so exactly the same day. They haven't come clean with their estimate of the cost. We look forward to it.

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In fact, the Tories also supported—the member from Halton, I understand, in Hansard said, “The people of Oakville have told you they don't want the proposed gas-fired power plant ... and I agree with them.” Again, September 14, 2010: “Minister, will you move the Oakville power plant? I'm asking the minister to consider moving this plant.”

It seems to me that the Tories support moving and cancelling when it's convenient, but when action is taken, they forget. There is a cost to all of those things. We're looking forward to the Tory estimates that they put to paper when they asked the questions and when they made the same campaign commitments.

HYDRO CORRIDOR

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister of Energy: Waterloo residents have taken up the fight against Hydro One's plans to spray herbicides on hydro corridors near their homes and schools. They're concerned about the impact on their children's health.

Why won't the minister take action to stop this spraying and protect the health of families in Waterloo?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I had a chance to address this yesterday. I had already taken action, actually. About a week and a half ago I walked along the hydro corridor with a number of residents and other interested persons to take an actual look at what was there, what was proposed.

I understand that there have already been some discussions and meetings and there are going to be further ones between the residents, the community and Hydro One about it, remembering, as I think the member knows, Hydro One has 150,000 kilometres of wire. They have corridors all over the province, and their responsibility is to make sure that we have reliable power and that when a line is cut or needs repair, they can access it quickly to get the power back up for the people all over the province. So we're already on that, Hydro One is already on that, having discussions—very helpful.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm glad the minister is getting a chance to take a walk.

In 2008, the McGuinty government passed the cosmetic pesticide act despite objections from the Canadian Cancer Society and others that the bill included a mile-wide loophole allowing hydro companies to spray dangerous pesticides on hydro corridors. The NDP proposed amendments to close this loophole, but the Liberals and the Conservatives defeated it.

Why won't the government, Minister, stand up for families in Waterloo and around the province and put an end to spraying cancer-causing chemicals in hydro corridors?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I think I spoke to this. Hydro One has already taken action down there. They're meeting with the residents to understand the issues. Our position: Our party has always stood for environmentally conscious initiatives. Our record shows that.

Unfortunately, the NDP consistently votes against environmental initiatives and protections. They want it both ways. It's sort of like on the teacher legislation, where they come in here and they complain about contracts, but they won't go out there at noon and tell the teachers that they're not going to agree to a salary increase, they're not going to provide a grid increase. In fact, they want to be

everything in here and everything out there. It's the party that wants to be it all, all the time. Well, if you don't stand for something, you stand for nothing, so make a decision.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Health—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would like to hear the member's question so I know where to direct it.

Member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I think it is very important that people can receive access to health care whenever they need it, as soon as possible. That is why we must continue to focus on reducing wait times in our hospital emergency departments. When someone feels that they need to seek medical attention in an emergency department, they should be able to. After years of hospitals being closed under the previous government, many in my riding in my city of Ottawa, and nurses being fired, we saw reports of record-high wait times. It is something that Ontarians have been concerned about.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: How long does it take to receive care in an Ottawa emergency department?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the fantastic member for this very important question.

Speaker, I couldn't agree more. Patients deserve to receive care when they need it, and that's why reducing emergency department wait times has been a priority for our hospitals and our government. We began measuring and publicly reporting wait times in 2008, because we know that if you track it, you can improve it.

The good news is that thanks to the hard work of people at the hospital and outside of hospitals, wait times at Ottawa emergency departments are down, and I'm talking about patients with complex conditions. Since 2008, they have seen a reduction in wait times at CHEO of 20%; 95% of patients are being seen within the targets. At Hôpital Montfort the length of stay is down 63%, with 77% of patients being seen within target. At the Ottawa Hospital, the length of stay for those complex spaces in the emergency department is down 30%, with 76% of patients being seen within targets.

There's more to do, but we've made tremendous progress.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I really do want to underscore how important it is to keep records on wait times, because if we don't have the information, if we are not transparent, we cannot do anything about it. We need to continuously make improvements.

Earlier in the summer, Speaker, I had the opportunity to visit the emergency department at the Ottawa Hospital

Civic Campus, which is in my riding of Ottawa Centre, with nurses, and I was extremely impressed by their hard work and dedication in making sure that we continue to bring wait times down. I want to salute all the nurses, the doctors and the health care providers for their excellent work.

Emergency departments are not the only option available to receive important health care services. I continue to advocate on behalf of my community to bring more services into the community, where residents can access them closer to home.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: What other options are available to those in Ottawa to receive health care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again a very important question. Speaker, over a quarter of a million people every year go to our emergency departments who could have received the care they need somewhere else in an alternative setting. These trips to the ER are avoidable, and the patients would have received excellent care at lower cost outside the hospital.

That's why we've launched an online tool called Your Health Care Options. This website helps Ontarians find the health care options that they need right in their community, as close to home as possible.

Ottawa residents could visit the Your Health Care Options website. They'll find that they could benefit from an urgent care centre, over 20 walk-in clinics, 13 family health teams and seven community health centres.

Speaker, this is all part of our action plan for health care, which is about getting people in Ontario the right care at the right time at the right place.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, last election, the Premier authorized your campaign team to cancel the Mississauga gas plant in a desperate attempt to save Liberal seats. This careless decision cost Ontarians \$190 million, and it's estimated to cost another \$1 billion for the cancellation of the Oakville power plant. These reckless and politically motivated actions robbed Ontarians of money that could have financed essential front-line services such as quality education, health care and deficit reduction. That money could have paid for 600 new doctors or 3,100 nurses. Instead, you used taxpayer dollars to fund your election campaign.

Minister, at a time when Ontario is facing a \$411-billion debt, why do you think it's acceptable to use millions of hard-earned taxpayer dollars to ensure that you save a few Liberal seats?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I've answered that. They actually agreed with the decision. Now they seem to be trying to get away from it.

I want to read you part of a letter from the mayor of Kitchener about the southwest economic development fund. He says in part, "Given these realities, we are writing today to ask you to support Bill 11"—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Prince Edward-Hastings, you're very close to me, and when you shout that loud, I cannot hear the answer.

Minister.

1130

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The mayor of Kitchener says, "Given these realities, we are writing to ask you to support Bill 11, Attracting Investment and Creating Jobs Act, 2011. Modeled on the successful eastern Ontario development fund, which has demonstrated a significant return on the government's investment, we believe that a new southwestern Ontario development fund will advance the city of Kitchener, the region of Waterloo and the province of Ontario's economic development agenda."

The question is, why won't you stand up for the people without work in southwestern Ontario? Give them a hand; support the economic development fund.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: The problem is, it's because of this government that we have 600,000 people unemployed in the province of Ontario.

The other thing is, this government is always worried about the next election, but they don't give a damn about the next generation.

Minister, your government has made the people of Ontario wait nearly two years for the release of information regarding the cost of the Oakville plant cancellation. It's unacceptable that you are withholding this information from this Legislature and from the people of Ontario. It's clear that the Premier and his Liberal caucus have something to hide. Are you scared to reveal the cost for the cancellation of the Oakville power plant to the people of Ontario, and if not, will you commit to releasing this report today?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Here are some more quotes on the economic development fund: "Sometimes, you've got to decide not what should be the party line but what would be good for the towns and cities" in your riding. That's the mayor of London.

"Why can we not treat this almost like a wartime situation—this is the right thing to do and let's do it?.... They're not getting that the public wants leadership [and] that's not part of partisanship." Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley.

"It is the wrong time to be playing politics, the wrong time to hold this up. The last thing we need here is another stall tactic." Goderich Deputy Mayor John Grace.

Isn't it time for the PCs to stand up for the people of Ontario—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): It doesn't seem as though I'm getting through to everyone that we're a little too loud. I need to hear the answer.

Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you, Speaker. I know that in a few minutes, we're going to get an opportunity. Maybe the five-minute or 10-minute bell will give them a chance to reflect. Vote in favour of the people looking for work in southwestern Ontario and eastern Ontario. Support Bill 11. I think they absolutely have to support Bill 11. It's the right thing to do. It's the right time to do it. We absolutely need this bill.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Middlesex-London EMS is coping with record amounts of calls, but as paramedics struggle to respond, this minister is cutting more than \$240,000 from the same service.

How can the minister justify a compensation package to former London hospital CEO Clifford Nordal of more than \$1 million while cutting this life-or-death service?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for raising this issue. It is an issue that I have been working on with the EMS, and I am confident we're going to be able to arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement.

There were some budget issues. I think the member opposite knows that I have been personally engaged in this issue, and I'm looking forward to resolution as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time for oral questions has expired.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Nipissing has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy concerning the cost of the Oakville power plant. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Leeds–Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy concerning the cancellation of the Mississauga and Oakville power plants. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT AND CREATING JOBS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 VISANT À ATTIRER LES INVESTISSEMENTS ET À CRÉER DES EMPLOIS

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act respecting the continuation and establishment of development funds in order to promote

regional economic development in eastern and southwestern Ontario / Projet de loi 11, Loi concernant la prorogation et la création de fonds de développement pour promouvoir le développement économique régional dans l'Est et le Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1140.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Duguid has moved third reading of Bill 11. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Paul
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John
Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Moridi, Reza
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Murray, Glen R.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Best, Margaret	Hoskins, Eric	Oraziotti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Jaczek, Helena	Piruzza, Teresa
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Prue, Michael
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Chan, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Chiarelli, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Coteau, Michael	Marchese, Rosario	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crack, Grant	Mathews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Craitor, Kim	McGuinty, Dalton	Wynna, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	
Dickson, Joe	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Amott, Ted	Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonnell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McKenna, Jane	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Harris, Michael	Milligan, Rob E.	Yurek, Jeff
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 55; the nays are 32.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the bill carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Huron–Bruce has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Energy concerning the cost of the cancellation of the

Oakville gas plant. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1144 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Many of us here have come back to the Legislature in the middle of this summer, and I know for many of my colleagues it's been a bit difficult arranging child care and vacations. I've had the pleasure of having my little girl here this week, because next week she will be back in the classroom. But here she is today: Victoria Varner. Many of you know her. I'd like to introduce my little girl. She's seven years old, and I'd like to thank her for coming to work with mama.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd ask all members of the Legislature to join me in welcoming some guests in the members' gallery. They are teachers here from the rally earlier, and they're here to enjoy and see what goes on in the Legislature. We have Amisha Sirpal, Alison Horn, Myra Remedios, Carol Laderoute, Aimie Mirza, Katherine Dashawetz and Jaspreet Dhaliwal.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KYLE CLIFFORD

Mr. Rob Leone: All across Ontario, young boys dream of having many different titles when they grow up: doctor, astronaut, superhero and maybe even MPP. There's one title at the top of every list. It holds a lot of weight in this country, and that is Stanley Cup champion. Kyle Clifford, from the town of Ayr, realized that dream on June 11, 2012, when he and the rest of the Los Angeles Kings hoisted that franchise's first-ever Stanley Cup. Keeping with tradition, each member of the cup-winning team gets 24 hours with the Holy Grail of hockey, and Clifford used that time to bring the cup home to Cambridge and North Dumfries.

On August 22, in front of over 1,000 cheering fans and perched atop an antique fire engine driving through the heart of Ayr, Kyle sat alongside his latest accomplishment in a career that began as a member of the Ayr Flames youth team and included such honours as representing Team Canada at the under-18 world championships.

I congratulate Kyle for all his hard work, both last season and throughout his career, and can only hope that his story inspires young hockey players right across Cambridge and North Dumfries to fulfill their dreams of maybe one day lifting the greatest trophy in sports.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I am so proud to be able to share with the members of this Legislature the amazing

generosity displayed by Habitat for Humanity and many other businesses in London, Ontario, to an amazing family in the London-Fanshawe riding.

On Thursday, July 26, Habitat for Humanity Oxford-Middlesex-Elgin donated its second wheelchair-accessible home to an inspirational family and made their dreams come true. After 12 years on a waiting list, London-Fanshawe resident Kerri Ronson and her son, Brendon, were given the keys to their new home at 361 Edmonton Street at a dedication ceremony held in their honour. The new compact family home is fully accessible for Brendon, who has cerebral palsy, a physical condition affecting motor skills and the coordination of muscles, leaving him in a wheelchair. The public was invited to come out and celebrate with the Ronson family and tour the home. Ms. Ronson was so excited and grateful to all the sponsors and the more than 350 volunteers for donating thousands of hours to make her dream a reality.

I want to thank all the sponsors. It is because of your involvement, hard work and commitment to families like the Ronsons that they can enjoy the independence of a new home.

In total, Habitat for Humanity has built and donated 38 homes, and they are not stopping. Currently, Habitat for Oxford-Middlesex-Elgin is finalizing plans for three more builds, one home each in London, St. Thomas and Woodstock.

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL RECIPIENTS

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, in this, the year of the 60th anniversary of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, I've had the opportunity to recognize some outstanding people in our western Mississauga neighbourhoods. Sixteen-year-old Streetsville resident Erica Scarff, who lost her right leg due to a rare form of cancer four years ago, is a Diamond Jubilee Medal awardee. Erica inspired a family friend to organize Erica's Wish, an annual run that attracts hundreds of participants to raise funds for cancer research and also for the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Erica's cancer is in remission.

Abdul Qayyum Mufti, another awardee, is one of the founding members of the Al-Falah mosque. Two years ago, he brought together the local Muslim community to establish an annual Family Day walkathon each February. Pledging a gift of a quarter of a million dollars to Mississauga's Credit Valley Hospital, the run has exceeded its goals every year.

Bishop Lennox Walker, a resident of Lisgar, is a powerful speaker and an inspirational leader who has built and led the faith community at Praise Cathedral Worship Centre in Meadowvale. His tireless work with youth and leadership in the Caribbean Canadian community makes Bishop Walker and all of the people I've mentioned worthy Diamond Jubilee Medal recipients.

On behalf of the province, I congratulate each of them and each of the people whom we all have the pleasure and the honour of presenting with medals.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM OFFICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Last week, a delegation from Elgin county and St. Thomas met with Minister Milloy regarding the recent announcement to close the ODSF office in my riding. The ministry caught my riding off guard with this announcement, as no indication or consultation was made beforehand.

With over 3,000 people currently using the services provided by the office, I met with Mayor Heather Jackson of St. Thomas and Bill Walters, warden of Elgin county, to explore ways to ensure people were not denied access to this vital service, to mitigate the negative effects of these cuts. The mayor and warden put together a proposal that has the potential to save the ministry money while keeping the service offering in St. Thomas.

To provide for further consultations, the municipal leaders also requested in their proposal that the closure date in October be delayed. This proposal was presented to the minister at the AMO conference last week but did not receive a commitment one way or the other.

Unfortunately, after nine years of mismanaged finances, the government is beginning to unilaterally cut front-line services, hoping people will not notice. But right now, I'd like to call on the minister to immediately reply to the proposal from the city of St. Thomas and Elgin county and grant an extension on that closure date of the ODSF office in St. Thomas so that proper consultation can occur and prove to the ministry that money can be saved without sacrificing the vital service.

DIANA MATHESON

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Each Olympics, there are special moments that captivate Canadians. At the London games, one of those moments was delivered by Oakville's Diana Matheson. In the dying seconds of the overtime bronze medal game, Diana scored the winning goal that lifted our team over the French team.

The team's resilient spirit was evident as they bounced back following that tough semi-final loss to the US that involved a very questionable call by the referee. "Resilient" would be a good word to describe Diana as well. She excelled in her development at the Oakville Soccer Club, but due to her size, Diana was often passed up by teams at the provincial and the national level. But that didn't stop her. Hard work and determination to overcome this paid off. She was named the Ivy League player of the year in 2007, Princeton's athlete of the year in 2008, and at the same time earned her economics major.

She has represented Canada now 130 times. She holds the national record for the most consecutive international appearances. Paul Varian, the CAO at Oakville Soccer Club, has called Diana "the workhorse" of the national team, and she's an inspiration to young women around this country.

I'd like to congratulate Diana and the entire national team for their success and for making this country so proud of what they did.

1510

TEACHERS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise today and acknowledge the fact that we had such a powerful showing of teachers here today representing their interests, representing their belief in the education system and clarifying for the record that there is no crisis here. This crisis is a fabricated crisis created by the Liberal government. The teachers have never said that the classrooms would be shut down. They have never said that the classroom doors would be shut. They've never said that this year would be in any jeopardy. This is absolutely a fabricated crisis by the Liberal government, and they are now solving their own fabricated problem and trying to get accolades for that. This is clearly an example of partisan posturing to win a by-election.

It needs to be very clear that the teachers were here in great numbers and education workers were here in great numbers to show their respect for the education system, to show their concern and care for Ontarians, for students, for families. I salute them for attending today, I salute them for their convictions, and I stand with them in working to ensure that our education is strong here in Ontario, to ensure that our classrooms are providing the best opportunities for our children here in Ontario.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It gives me great pleasure to rise today in this House to speak to the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation, and that is full-day kindergarten.

I'm pleased to share with this House that there will be 93 full-day kindergarten classes in 28 schools in my riding of Scarborough Southwest. I'm so pleased about this because a recent study out of the University of Toronto confirmed what our government and education experts have been saying: that there are tremendous benefits of full-day kindergarten. Kids enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs are found to have a higher level of skill in vocabulary, reading, comprehension, mathematics and complex drawing skills.

I'm so proud to be a part of this government that has consistently supported this program since its introduction. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same for the official opposition or the third party. Mr. Hudak's PC Party was against full-day kindergarten, called it a "frill," and changed his mind when polls showed that it was popular with Ontario families. Ms. Horwath was quoted as saying, "Absolutely we support full-day learning ... and absolutely it's something that we've been calling for." That was on October 27, 2009, and yet, when it came down to putting their vote where the rhetoric is, they voted against funding for full-day kindergarten.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues to support full-day kindergarten. We are proud of the value of this program for all Ontario families.

YOGA WARRIORS

Mr. Rod Jackson: Today, I'd just like to talk about Yoga Warriors. This is a local initiative aimed at assisting first responders and brave people in the line of duty who suffer from combat stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorders. These disorders may be incurred from traumatic situations experienced by soldiers, firefighters, police officers and paramedics. Traditional therapy and medication are not a perfect fit for everyone, and that's why this alternative program has an important place in the recovery of those with PTSD.

Yoga Warriors is inspired by an American program that started in the Worcester Vet Center in Massachusetts for soldiers returning home. It served thousands of soldiers and spread across military bases countrywide. Today, Yoga Warriors International is the first and largest program in the nation for healing combat veterans through yoga. Instructors have been trained in 29 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and Cambodia. Other countries are starting to get on board as well.

Barrie resident Nicole Taylor was inspired when she heard about the program and visited a Boston-area vet centre. This led to her bringing Yoga Warriors to Canada, starting in her hometown in Barrie. It's the first of its kind this side of the border, and this enterprising concept is making a difference for people with combat stress disorder and PTSD by reducing insomnia, hyperarousal, flashbacks and anger.

I've met a few of these individuals who have been recipients of this type of therapy, Mr. Speaker. I can say, first-hand, I've met people whose lives have been saved by this program, and I think we owe them a great debt of gratitude for those that they help.

SAUGEEN SHORES BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: At a time when, here in Ontario, we have lost 600,000 good-paying jobs, I am pleased to recognize the Saugeen Shores Business Enterprise Centre in my riding for their innovative ideas and forward thinking to help create business opportunities.

I want to draw particular attention to their student companies program, a program that shows students the ropes in building a small business from the ground up.

Summer Company is a program for students aged 15 to 29, and it encourages people to start up and run their own summer business. If successful, applicants can receive up to \$1,500 towards their business start-up costs and another \$1,500 for successful completion of the program. The student also receives 12 hours of business training, along with hands-on mentoring and advice. This has brought seven new businesses to our community, including a computer repair shop, a deck resurfacing company, a dance and fitness studio, two seafood markets, a T-shirt shop and a digital marketing business.

These students range in age from grade 11 to their fourth year in university. This is an excellent program to

give students the experience and help they need to navigate the entrepreneurial world. I applaud the Saugeen Shores Business Enterprise Centre for working alongside these students to ensure their successful business ventures. Programs like this will help bring more small business to Ontario and create jobs for the future.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AMENDMENT ACT (BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE (COMMISSION DE RÉGIE INTERNE)

Mr. Gerretsen moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to the Board of Internal Economy /
Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la Commission de régie interne.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I'll wait until ministerial statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to rise in the House today to introduce the proposed Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, dealing with the Board of Internal Economy, 2012. This bill would amend the Legislative Assembly Act, 1990 to change the composition of the Board of Internal Economy—the management board that deals with the administrative and financial affairs of the Office of the Assembly. Just for those individuals who may be watching this, I will illuminate and use some language to show exactly what the Board of Internal Economy deals with.

As I mentioned before, it's the management body that deals with the administrative and financial affairs of the Office of the Assembly, basically the premises that we're in today and the individuals who work here.

The board's powers and duties include reviewing the estimates and forecasts, expenditures, commitments and other data pertaining to the Office of the Assembly and assessing the results of that. It also deals with approving the organization and staffing of the Office of the Assembly, such as the Clerk's office and the many other people who work in the Clerk's area.

It approves and reviews administrative policies and procedures related to the operation of the Office of the Assembly. It also advises on all matters relating to the management, administration, accounting, collection and disbursement of money associated with the Legislative Assembly fund.

It also deals with the budgets of and oversees the operation of the independent officers of the assembly, such as the Auditor General, the Environment Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The proposed amendment changes the composition of the board so that there's an equal number of members appointed by the government party and by the opposition parties, aside from the Speaker. The Speaker would continue to act as Chair, as has always been the case, but would be a non-voting member of the board. In other words, decisions would be made by consensus.

1520

Currently, the Legislative Assembly Act does not provide for an equal number of members appointed by the government party and by the opposition parties. As a matter of fact, the majority of the members currently are appointed by the government party. The new act would provide for the governing party to appoint two members to the board, and each of the opposition parties, one member to the board. All parties have expressed support for the proposed Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, 2012. As I've indicated before—or if I haven't, I will do so now—we consulted with the opposition parties on the proposals of this bill.

As you know, Speaker, this bill addresses a provision in a motion that was passed with the unanimous consent of this Legislative Assembly back on May 31 of this year. That motion directed the Attorney General to introduce a bill, by the third day of the House fall session, to amend section 87 of the Legislative Assembly Act, 1990; this being the second day, it's well within the three-day limit set out in that motion.

The motion also provides that this bill is to receive second and third reading on the first Tuesday following the introduction, so that would be next Tuesday, and that second and third reading are to occur immediately, without debate or amendment.

What it basically provides for, Speaker, is that, from here on in, the Board of Internal Economy, in dealing with all the matters that come before the assembly—and it affects assembly members—will be done on the basis of consensus, rather than, as it has been in the past, the government party, basically, imposing its will on the Board of Internal Economy.

This is a good amendment. The assembly is an institution that, in effect, belongs to every member of this House, and I believe that this consensus model that has been arrived at, as a result of the motion that was passed at the end of May of this past year, is a good motion, and therefore I would suggest that all the members of this assembly support this bill once it comes for second and third reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Responses?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to respond to the statement made by the Honourable John Gerretsen, the Attorney General for the province, in response to the bill, now tabled, that will set up the Board of Internal Economy. All I can say is, thank God. Hopefully this new consensus model will work. We've had 18 years with an absolutely incompetent, ineffective—nice people on it; good intentions, but can't get anything done.

I remember we spent probably—and the table will correct me—two and a half years arguing about fixing the washroom in the north wing. If you're diabetic, having washrooms on every floor and in every corner isn't such a bad idea around here—as I am. We can't decide on simple things like fixing the washroom at the back door right now, which is closed—the men's washroom—in case anybody hasn't noticed. That debate has been going on for six or seven years that it's been in disrepair, and more recently it's actually permanently closed. That's a major staff entrance where hundreds of people go through every day, and yet there's no washroom on that floor; you have to go all the way to the other end.

I want to say that this is a consensus model that we're trying for the first time in the history of Ontario. It's based on the Ottawa model. As the minister pointed out, there will be two government members, one from the crown, i.e., a cabinet minister, and one from the regular benches, and there will be one opposition member from each opposition party, for a total of two, and we'll have a Chair, which will be the Speaker. The Speaker will be a non-voting member.

We're hoping, through this way—in the past, people at home should know that the government always had a massive majority on the Board of Internal Economy. No government likes to spend money. The government that I was a cabinet minister in for eight years was just as guilty as any other government in the last 18 years. We had orders from the corner office—from the Premier's office—not to spend money. This way you'll have some autonomy, hopefully. Hopefully, simple matters like keeping the building up—we owe this to the people of Ontario, to keep this building in half-decent shape. When we're long gone and dead, we want to see this beautiful building here for our children and grandchildren, and long past that.

Parliamentary democracy requires that proper resources be in place so that we can do our jobs. We have the privilege of representing the people of Ontario, and certain resources and certain things in the building have to be in place to do that. The Board of Internal Economy sets the budget for the entire precinct. This precinct is like a city. We used to, until the recent restructuring, have about 400 employees under the Clerk. I'm not sure what we have now, but I'm sure it's very efficient. Those employees do everything from printing services to committees branch; our table clerks; our Clerk and deputy clerks; cleaning and maintenance staff; the library and its expert researchers that we have there—wonderful

services; legislative counsel; security and precinct police; Hansard; legislative information services; public affairs; finance; tours; protocol. All kinds of offices are run out of this building and a couple of other areas in the precinct.

Thank you to the government for agreeing. You were forced into this by the opposition, by the way, because it comes out of the programming motion that got you out of the legislative logjam that we were in in June. Nonetheless, we're here. I think all parties are going to agree to certainly support this. Let's make it work.

It's ridiculous that people come in here and the place looks—you go to other Legislatures; you go to the United States, states that are smaller than ours, and they take great pride in their precincts and they make sure the resources are there to do exactly that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: In the words of Martin Luther King, I would say the following: Functionality at last. Functionality at last. Functionality at last. Hallow be praised. We may have a board that will actually do things.

Speaker, I have probably one of the unenviable tasks or honours of being the longest-serving member on the board. I've been on the board since the early 1990s. I've served under the Bob Rae government. I've served under the Mike Harris government and under the Ernie Eves government and now the Peterson government—or, I mean the—

Laughter.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's the same. They used to spend like drunken sailors, both of them. That's a whole other story, but anyway—under Mr. McGuinty's government and what has been really striking is that each and every one of those governments has been unwilling to make the board function because they're always worried of having to wear all of the decisions because of the way that the board was structured. I have argued for years—and I know those who've sat on the board with me have heard me harp about this at the board for years. I've always said that if we ever get a minority Parliament or I become government, one of the first things that I want to do is to change the functionality of the Board of Internal Economy; that we needed to have something that actually creates, as my friend Mr. Wilson has said and my friend Mr. Gerretsen has said, something that is more non-partisan, something that checks the baggage at the door when it comes to our partisanship and says, "We are here to do the right thing," and that is to do some of the things that are necessary to maintain the building and do the things that have to be done around here for posterity.

Mr. Wilson raises some of the issues that we've had to deal with at the board. I've got to say, as a board member, I'm not going to get into those because I don't want to start using names. But I've got to tell you, it's been a pretty frustrating and actually quite comical process to watch at the board, because really simple things that were no-brainers that you could have fixed

with simple agreement just couldn't be done. More times than not, the government wanted to fix it; they wanted to be able to do the right thing, but would worry that the "we gotcha" politics would come out of it later on and they would have to wear the decision, so no decision would be made.

I've argued for a long time that we should take a look at what Ottawa and other Parliaments do, which is a Board of Internal Economy that is made up of an equal number of members of the opposition to the government. That way, it allows everybody to sit down, leave their politics at the door and make the kinds of decisions that we need to make around this place that allow this place to function more fully.

I would say as well this year that I think it demonstrates that minority Parliaments do work. We've heard a lot over this little election season with the by-elections going on about the need to have majorities and how important it is to have a majority to make things work. Let me tell you, let's not make any illusions: This would not happen in a majority Parliament. Only in a minority Parliament would you be able to do that, unless it was an NDP government, because it's something I would have forced my leader to do. Hopefully she would have listened, and I'm sure she would have. But my point is, it proves that minority Parliaments can work. I think what we can do, by way of the Board of Internal Economy, is to show this Legislature, show all of the parties, that by sitting down and looking at a problem and working together, we can finally get to a solution that works for all. Is it exactly what we individually all want? Probably not, but it's a decision that we all can live with.

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I've just got to say, as the many members who've served on the board with me and before me, I look forward to the day of the board now sitting in its new composition of an equal member from opposition and government, and we'll be able to do the kind of things that should be done around here in order to respect this building and respect the work that the board has to do.

ANNALEISE CARR

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak in celebration of Annaleise Carr being the youngest person to swim across Lake Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has asked for unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's my pleasure to stand in this House today and send our best, and we're so proud of Annaleise Carr, and from our leader, Andrea, and from our whole party. It's good to rise today in recognition of a determined and triumphant young woman: Annaleise.

Annaleise has accomplished something that few women would even dream of and even fewer would dare

to attempt. On Sunday, August 26, she became the youngest person ever to successfully swim across Lake Ontario. It took 27 hours, in cold water, high winds, through dark, through 52 kilometres of water.

To read the detailed accounts of all the training, logistics and dedication of both Annaleise, her family and team to get her to this day and the year that led up to this humbling event, to give you a small sense of the planning and teamwork that was needed to accomplish this amazing feat, here is a small excerpt from a Toronto Star story:

"The flotilla consisted of six boats, each with his own role and driver. Extra gas has been packed and each driver understands his place for the crossing. A Zodiac boat will ride on either side of Annaleise, close enough to talk to her but keeping a safe distance. The kayak will serve as her navigation aid and constant companion, but must stay at least three metres away to avoid any chance of accidental touching, which would bring the swim to a halt, according to rules established by Solo Swims Ontario, the governing body of the swim."

This is only one small part of the story. Annaleise did all of this, spent a year intensely training and planning for this day, all for one reason: to raise money for a cause that she thought was worthy. This camp is Camp Trillium, a camp for children affected by cancer near Waterford, Ontario. Through all of her efforts, she has raised more than \$145,000, and this number continues to grow as Annaleise gets local, national and international media attention.

On Monday, a parade in her hometown will be celebrating her accomplishments and those of all the people who supported her along the way. Annaleise accomplished something that very few of us could or would even dream of, but she provides a lesson to all of us: that dedication, hard work and the duty to give back is something we can all do and be part of.

She also provides an amazing example of dedication and sport. She is a role model for youth in our country. A 14-year-old girl swam across Lake Ontario: simply amazing. If this doesn't get our young people involved in sports, I don't know what will. This is amazing for Canadian youth. This young lady should be immortalized for what she did.

Having just seen the Olympics and our ladies' soccer team accomplish what they did—questionable refereeing, I might add—and as well, I'll wait for the Paralympics to begin tomorrow. This is an example of great sportsmanship that is closer to home but is just as worthy of our attention and praise. It is good to have the opportunity to rise in this House today to send our congratulations to this amazing young woman.

On a personal note, my aunt would be extremely proud of Annaleise. She's no longer with us, but my aunt taught a few Olympians. She also was, in the 1930s, probably one of the best, if not the best 200 breaststroker in Canada. She taught at the Jimmy Thompson Pool in Hamilton for 40 years. I'll tell you, my aunt would be so proud of this 14-year-old.

Thank you, Annaleise. Thank you for this incentive to the youth of Canada. We are very proud of you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is my distinct pleasure to rise today on behalf of our government to recognize Annaleise Carr, a remarkable young woman from Walsh, Ontario, who just at 14 years old, the same age as my twins, has captivated people from all over the world, becoming the youngest person to ever swim across Lake Ontario. The very fact she was able to accomplish a gruelling 27-hour, 52-kilometre swim is nothing short of amazing. This feat required extensive training and planning that began in February, with preparations that included a 10-kilometre swim in Lake Erie. Faced with four-foot rolling waves, 20-kilometre-an-hour headwinds, boat traffic and water temperatures of 13 degrees, her will and determination was nothing short of amazing.

Yet when you just thought that was more than enough, this inspirational story is even more touching as a result of the reasons why Annaleise decided to take on such an intense personal challenge. Annaleise was swimming to raise money for Camp Trillium, a childhood cancer support centre that brings children with cancer and their families together while helping to enhance the quality of their life. Having visited the camp as part of a fundraising effort her swimming and running team organized, she decided she wanted to do more to help send kids to Camp Trillium. At the time, she was only 13 years old and too young to volunteer. So instead, she decided to raise money by attempting to become the youngest person to swim across Lake Ontario. She visualized the gates at Camp Trillium any time she found herself tiring.

Incredibly, when she entered the waters at Queen's Royal Park in Niagara-on-the-Lake to begin her marathon journey, she had already reached her fundraising goal of \$30,000. During the swim, she would learn that her fundraising totals nearly quadrupled, and by the time she got out of the water at Marilyn Bell Park in Toronto, donations had reached over \$115,000. That's fantastic. With donations still coming in, she has surpassed \$127,000, an amount that will pay to send 135-plus kids to Camp Trillium for a week. The fundraising drive continues until Labour Day, shortly before she starts grade 9.

We understand that on September 3, as my honourable colleague mentioned, Norfolk council has decided to throw a parade in Annaleise's honour in downtown Simcoe, which is a lovely tribute to all that she has accomplished. I also want to mention that she was once a legislative page right here at Queen's Park.

In so many ways, Annaleise is a role model for all of us. She is focused on setting goals and overcoming challenges, no matter what she confronts along the way. Her achievements, like many achievements, were supported by a fantastic team around her: Coach Lisa Anderson; general manager Dave Scott; ground crew Bill Martin; family physician Dr. Ghesquiere; the kayakers; the pacers; her parents, Jeff and Debbie Carr, of course; her grandparents Ken and Sharon; and her role model, the

wonderful role model of Marilyn Bell, who in 1956 became the first person to swim across Lake Ontario.

Myself, as a survivor of childhood cancer, I want to say thank you, Annaleise, to you and your team. Camp Trillium is a wonderful place where kids with cancer can go and forget about the medical procedures and all the tests and just have fun, which is so important when kids are battling cancer.

Your province is proud of you, and it's my distinct pleasure to stand in the House to introduce to all of us the government of Ontario and say, thank you very much, Annaleise, for all that you have accomplished and for becoming the new Lady of the Lake. We wish you the very best as you embark on the next milestones of your life. Congratulations, Annaleise.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: It was just a few short months ago that I rose in the House to introduce to all of us the legislative page from my riding and her plan to become the youngest person to swim Lake Ontario. That day we all gave her a standing ovation. I'm obviously proud to stand here today. As we know, Annaleise did it—14-year-old Annaleise Carr, the new Lady of the Lake, as was indicated, as of 9:04 p.m. August 19.

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You know, over the years, we as MPPs meet so many wonderful people. They tirelessly contribute to their communities, and every so often we meet someone who's head and shoulders, even at 4 foot 10—I think she was 4 foot 9 when she was a page—above the rest. People across Ontario have been brimming with pride, happiness and love for Annaleise—it's making headlines across Canada and abroad—not only for her athletic abilities but her infectious smile. I consider her Ontario's Mighty Mite. She's not only the new Lady of the Lake; she's now Canada's new sweetheart.

Near the end of her stint as a page, we had the traditional lunch in the dining room. She talked a great deal about what she called "Annaleise's radical crossing." It was an exciting conversation. I don't think we really fathomed the impact it would have on people once she was successful.

She swam 51.5 kilometres and touched the wall at Marilyn Bell Park here in Toronto. She had been in the water for 27 hours. The beauty of this doesn't lie so much with the athleticism of this very tiny little girl, but the reason that she worked so hard to do this. Why? Very simply, to raise money for children with cancer to attend Camp Trillium.

The camp is blessed. It's in our riding. It's at Rainbow Lake in Waterford. She did a swim with some of her colleagues to raise money. She went to the camp, had a tour and said that she wanted to help out. They told her she wasn't old enough. So she thought, "I'm going to swim across Lake Ontario and raise some money."

It was her younger sister, Larissa—her grandmother tells me that Larissa is just as accomplished a swimmer

as Annaleise. Larissa told Annaleise she could do it; she could swim the lake.

Her goal was \$30,000—that seemed like an awful lot of money; well on the road to \$150,000. I think all of us here can spread the word of that. I think we can keep putting that up a bit.

I might mention that Larissa, her sister, will be joining us in October as a page.

Annaleise is a hero in the purest form. Just ask those little ones at camp. They can forget about being a cancer kid for a while.

There were a few times during the swim when Annaleise hit the wall a couple of times on that Saturday night. The swells of up to five feet were taller than she was. She says, "During the night, I thought about getting out because in the water it's dark, it's cold; you're all by yourself in the water. When the waves were that big, you couldn't see anyone."

At 7 a.m. Sunday, she'd been in the water for 13 hours. Her tiny body had endured a battle. She got some protein at that time. Some swimmers had come in to swim alongside. The sun came up, and her doctor said she could keep going.

There was a press conference down in Port Dover. She was quick to point out that all of this would never have been possible without her family and the team that was mentioned earlier. Even during the darkest moments of her swim, she was able to stay positive.

Also, it's no surprise, Speaker, that this young lady was valedictorian at Walsh Public School this year. In her speech, she reminded her classmates of all the things they should be thankful for and she encouraged them, "Take this opportunity to write an unforgettable chapter filled with the fulfilment of your dreams and desires. Let us build on our experiences here at Walsh to better ourselves and others around us. There is a lot of power inside all of us waiting to be unleashed." And as she foretold, in a few short weeks she would go on to be known as a role model for all ages.

It's tough to put the right words together to articulate how proud all of us are of Annaleise Carr making history, making us proud and making the world a whole lot brighter. Thank you, Annaleise. You are an inspiration for all of us.

PETITIONS

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in independent practice need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their

clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the dental hygienists in independent practice, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition, sign it and pass it on to page Roberto.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks."

I'm pleased to add my name in support of the petition and will send it to the table with page Louis.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

"Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

I support this petition. I send it forward with Constantine.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on April 22, 2002, Premier Dalton McGuinty signed a pledge in North Bay to never privatize the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC); and

"Whereas high energy prices have forced northern Ontario businesses to close or move, including Xstrata, which had moved its Timmins smelter operations to Quebec and made up 10% of Ontario Northland railway's business; and

"Whereas some 60 lumber mills have closed across northern Ontario in recent years with a loss of 10,000 resource jobs, and Ontario fell from being the number one mining jurisdiction in the world to number 23 due to high taxes and government red tape, resulting in the erosion of Ontario Northland's commercial customer base; and

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"Whereas the Far North Act that has banned development and turned much of northern Ontario into a virtual museum is the biggest barrier to new job creation in northern Ontario and cost Ontario Northland business; and

"Whereas the ONTC was completely omitted from the province's northern growth plan issued two years ago; and

"Whereas the former Liberal MPP for Nipissing staged an election campaign announcement on September 30, 2011, regarding what is now known to be a non-existent strategic alliance between the ONTC and Metro-linx; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario on March 23, 2012, announced it would wind down and divest itself of the ONTC and its assets with no prior consultation with community stakeholders in Nipissing and across north-eastern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, hereby demand the Premier come to North Bay ... and explain why ... he abandoned northern Ontario."

I agree with this and will give this to page Gopi.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further petitions? The member for Durham.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham region as follows:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to one of the new pages, Constantine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. My apologies to the member for Parkdale-High Park, but my view was blocked.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Apology accepted, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I absolutely agree with this, sign it on behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized because of the way they look, and I'm going to give it to Pamika to deliver to the table. I will sign it.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Georgia.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers."

I agree with this petition and will be passing it off to page Gopi.

INFRASTRUCTURE ROUTIÈRE

M. Phil McNeely: « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu qu'il y a actuellement une étude de l'évaluation environnementale des liaisons inter-provinciales en cours afin de trouver l'emplacement d'un nouveau pont traversant la rivière des Outaouais à l'est du centre-ville d'Ottawa;

« Attendu que la province de l'Ontario investit 220 millions de dollars pour améliorer l'échangeur 417/174 et élargir la 417 de l'échangeur à la rue Nicholas;

« Attendu que ces améliorations ont été autorisées afin de répondre à un besoin urgent des navetteurs d'Orléans et des régions environnantes;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral a déménagé près de 5 000 emplois de la GRC du centre-ville à Barrhaven;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral va déplacer 10 000 emplois du ministère de la Défense nationale du centre-ville à Kanata;

« Attendu que plus de la moitié de ces emplois étaient occupés par des résidents d'Orléans et des communautés environnantes;

« Attendu que le déplacement de ces emplois aura un impact drastique sur l'économie d'Orléans;

« Attendu que le besoin en infrastructure routière est requis pour les résidents qui devront traverser notre ville pour se rendre à leur travail;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à la province de l'Ontario et au ministère des Transports de faire leur part pour mettre fin à cette étude environnementale; et, bien entendu, que les améliorations aux infrastructures routières en cours sur les autoroutes 174 et 417 bénéficient Orléans et ses environs; et, bien entendu, que

la province de l'Ontario supporte la ville d'Ottawa dans ses démarches pour convaincre le gouvernement fédéral de financer le prolongement du train léger du chemin Blair au chemin Trim, lequel est encore plus nécessaire depuis le déplacement des 15 000 emplois accessibles aux résidents d'Orléans vers l'extrême ouest;

« Nous, soussignés, supportons cette pétition et apposons nos noms ci-dessous. »

Moi, je supporte la pétition et je la donne à Tameem pour l'amener à la table. Merci, Tameem.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Petitions? The member for Nipissing.

BEER AND WINE SALES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas soft alcohol can only be sold by the provincially controlled LCBO or The Beer Store, with few exceptions; and

"Whereas consumers and taxpayers deserve a more convenient, efficient distribution system for beer and wine products;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario open up the distribution of beer, wine and other soft alcohol products to competitive forces and allow the sale of these products through corner stores and other beverage retailers in Ontario."

I will present this petition through page Georgia.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT
LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Ms. Broten moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. Broten has moved second reading of Bill 115. The minister.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I rise today to speak on behalf of Ontario families and in support of the Putting Students First Act.

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Ce projet de loi est nécessaire pour garantir la viabilité financière de notre système d'éducation financé par les fonds publics ainsi que la stabilité dans nos écoles.

Il est nécessaire pour que nous protégeions les gains que nous avons réalisés en éducation, tout en continuant à mettre en oeuvre la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants à

temps plein, à maintenir la taille réduite des classes et à préserver 20 000 emplois d'enseignant et de personnel de soutien.

Il est nécessaire pour que notre gouvernement puisse réduire le déficit provincial de manière équitable, équilibrée et responsable, tout en protégeant les services de base sur lesquels comptent les Ontariens, y compris notre système d'éducation public de classe mondiale.

As September fast approaches, so does the school year. Parents and students are busy getting ready for a new year, a new grade and new opportunities. For families, this is what September is all about—the ringing in of the new school year. But this year, unlike any other year since our government was first elected, there is something more in the air than excitement and anticipation. There is uncertainty; there are questions; there is confusion. Parents read the papers, and so do students. They know that teacher and support staff unions are talking about strike votes and that at least one union has already taken a vote for a day of action and received the support of 93% of its membership.

Strike votes and labour action—once common practice for an education sector that was antagonized, belittled and berated by past governments—have been a thing of the past in Ontario. It is one of our government's proudest achievements that since we were first elected in 2003, not a single school day has been lost because of province-wide teacher strikes. Working with our partners—teachers, support staff, principals and school boards—we rescued and resuscitated an education system that was in a manufactured crisis. What emerged from that crisis is an education system that is second to none. From those depths emerged a partnership between our government and an education sector that has shared common goals and shared equally in their success. Those goals continue to guide our work, our shared benchmark and the thread that pulls us upwards to new heights of excellence.

These goals are increasing student achievement, reducing gaps in achievement for struggling students and building confidence in our publicly funded education system. Working with our partners, we have delivered on all three goals. Test scores are up. Graduation rates continue to rise. Ontario students are now ranked among the highest achievers in the country and the world.

The Organization for Economic Development's Programme for International Student Assessment in 2009 ranked Ontario students among the top 10 readers in the world.

According to the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program's 2010 report, Ontario students were the only group, Speaker—the only group—to perform above the Canadian average in all three areas of math, reading and science.

In fact, Ontario students scored significantly higher than the Canadian average in all three subjects and were first when it came to reading—the only students to perform above the national average in that area.

Our effort to close the gap—the student achievement gap and the socioeconomic gap—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask people to take conversations out of the chamber and allow us to hear the minister.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you, Speaker.

Our effort to close the gap—the student achievement gap and the socioeconomic gap—is working. Ontario is now recognized as one of few jurisdictions in the world where 92% of students are meeting or exceeding international standards, regardless of socioeconomic background or first language. That is astounding progress.

Perhaps our greatest achievement with our partners has been full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation. As of this September, next week, about 120,000 students and their families will be benefiting from full-day kindergarten. That's up from 50,000 in 2011 and 35,000 in 2010.

The achievements of our students, teachers, educators and administrators working together have contributed to our final and important goal: restoring public confidence in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

We have come such a long way in less than a decade.

In 2003-04, the graduation rate in Ontario was 68%. Now it's 82%. That's 93,000 more students with a high school diploma than would have had the rate remained at the 2003-04 level. But our work is not done. We are committed to driving the grad rate up to 85%.

When it comes to how our students are doing, test scores are up: 69% of our students are meeting the provincial standard, and that's an increase of 15 percentage points, Speaker. But our goal is to get that number up to 75%.

Grâce aux efforts soutenus que nous avons déployés ensemble, nous avons réussi à mobiliser notre système et nos élèves pour obtenir des résultats d'apprentissage solides et équitables.

Les résultats d'apprentissage d'aujourd'hui permettront à nos élèves d'être concurrentiels dans l'économie du savoir de demain. C'est pour cette raison que notre engagement envers le rendement des élèves est ferme et résolu et qu'il s'est reflété à chaque étape de notre dialogue continu avec nos partenaires en éducation.

Les résultats que je viens de souligner ne démontrent pas seulement la réussite d'un gouvernement. Ils démontrent la réussite des enseignants et enseignantes, ils démontrent la réussite des parents, et surtout, ils démontrent la réussite des élèves. Ce sont les élèves dans tout l'Ontario qui passent les tests, qui font leurs devoirs, qui respectent les règles du jeu et qui obtiennent des résultats. Chaque cent alloué à l'éducation est dépensé d'une manière ou d'une autre au nom des élèves et dans leur intérêt.

Quand notre gouvernement a été élu pour la première fois, il a vu clairement que l'investissement le plus stratégique que nous pouvions faire, celui qui allait profiter le plus aux élèves, était l'investissement dans les enseignants. Pour les gouvernements précédents, les enseignants étaient devenus des cibles. Le corps

enseignant était démoralisé en Ontario, malgré son grand talent.

Our government was committed to putting an end to that. Through two rounds of labour negotiations, our commitment to teachers was reflected in the creation of provincial discussion tables and the significant investments and improvements that came out of them. PDTs were created as a way to bring unions and school boards together, with the government acting as the facilitator, to hammer out province-wide agreements on such issues of province-wide significance as compensation and benefits. Before PDTs, strictly local bargaining pitted union against union, local board against school board, and, where there were labour disruptions, parents against the education system.

That had to change. As a result of PDTs and as a result of our commitment to rebuilding public education in Ontario, it did change. In 2004 and 2008, working with teacher and support staff unions and school boards, our government helped facilitate agreements that provided significant increases in compensation, more teachers and support staff, and greatly improved working conditions. These were necessary investments to ensure students were getting the education they deserved.

Specifically, the 2004 to 2008 PDT resulted in funded salary increases for all education workers; funding for 2,630 elementary specialist teachers; funding for 1,900 secondary student success teachers; and zero lost learning days due to full-time teacher strikes.

Building on that, the 2008 to 2012 PDT resulted in a salary increase for staff and teachers; funding for 2,300 elementary specialist teachers; funding for 220 grades 7 to 8 teachers to support literacy and numeracy initiatives; funding for 650 grades 4 to 8 class size reduction teachers; funding for 890 secondary teachers; 400 additional professional and paraprofessional staff; 215 additional office support workers; approximately 500 additional custodians; and eight school years without a full-time-teacher strike.

These were necessary investments to ensure our education system was provided with the resources it needed to get a better pathway.

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Overall, the last PDTs have seen an additional 8,500 new teaching positions, resulting in lower class sizes; over 1,100 new support staff positions; significant increases in elementary prep time; and enhancements to wages, professional development, recognition and support for new teachers. Teachers have also seen significant pay increases.

Our government felt at the time, and continues to feel today, that this money was well spent. It was a strategic investment that recognized teachers for their hard work and professionalism and the overall importance of their work for the future of our students and our province. At the same time, we were increasing our investment in teachers and support staff. We were also increasing our overall investment in publicly funded education.

Since 2003, our government has increased the education budget by \$6.5 billion, or 45%, for a total investment

in 2012-13 of \$21 billion. Per pupil funding has risen to \$11,189. This represents an increase of about \$4,000 per student since 2003, an increase of 55%. We've invested heavily in new schools and school improvements. Again, these were strategic investments that reflected the needs and interests of one of our greatest assets, our students.

But it cannot be taken for granted that these investments also reflected the strength of Ontario's economy back in 2004 and 2008. Government revenues were high, the dollar was low, and manufacturing continued to be a leading contributor to Ontario's economic growth. There was money to be invested, and we did so wisely.

But in 2012, we can all agree that today is a different story. Ontario has been significantly impacted by the global recession, and we are now facing a deficit. This deficit comes in part because of our proactive response to global economic challenges. We didn't turn our back on Ontarians; we invested in them. We invested in preserving jobs. We laid the groundwork for future growth. To do so, we unveiled a significant stimulus package that has been credited for pulling Ontario's economy back from the brink.

We've made strong progress toward balancing the budget, and signs of economic growth are starting to appear. So we need to keep making the right choices, Speaker, to ensure that we continue making gains in education while overcoming the challenges of the deficit and global economic uncertainty. If Ontario does not take strong action, the deficit will grow, which would mean unsustainable levels of debt. We cannot allow that to happen. We will not allow that to happen.

That is why, when we invited our partners to a third round of PDTs back in February, we were clear that our choice was to constrain growth in compensation and benefits, areas that make up 85% of our education spending and—after years of increases—were ready for a two-year pause in the name of fairness to Ontarians and stability for our economy.

From the moment we were elected, our government has provided the investments necessary to bring education funding, including compensation, up to a level that reflects the needs of students and fair wages for teachers and support staff. As a government, we are confident that, with nearly a decade of increased resources, the education community has what it needs to continue to deliver world-class education provided by world-class instructors.

With that confidence, we presented clear fiscal parameters to our education partners that were necessary for a PDT agreement and, more broadly, the sustainability of education funding. At the time, these parameters were: a two-year agreement; 0% salary increases for two years, from September 1, 2012, to August 31, 2014; we sought to freeze banked sick days accumulated as of August 31, 2012, and any future payout of those sick days upon retirement would be at the employee's salary rate in effect as of August 31, 2012; we sought to replace retirement gratuities with a short-term sick leave plan which each year, and not carried forward from year to year,

offers six sick days paid at 100% salary and 24 weeks at 66.66%; and, effective September 1, 2012, we would eliminate all accumulated non-vested sick days.

Additionally, our government was clear that filing a valuation of the Ontario teachers' pension plan in 2012 is in the best interests of all parties, and that we would be seeking to resume negotiations with the Ontario Teachers' Federation to secure the future viability and solvency of the OTPP for future generations.

Lastly, we stated our wish to review school board salary grids with stakeholders, including but not limited to how employees move on the experience and qualification salary grid and the variation currently in the monetary value of each grid step, with a view to future sustainability.

These parameters were delivered to each of our partners on February 22 of this year. We were clear then, just as we are now, that these parameters are designed to find savings outside of the classroom, so that we continue to ensure the integrity of the classroom experience. This means protecting the gains we have made in education, continuing to roll out full-day kindergarten, keeping class sizes small and preserving 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

On February 28, PDT discussions with teacher federations, support staff representatives and trustee associations formally began. That same day, Ontario's largest teacher union, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, withdrew from the PDT process after giving us only one hour of their time. They walked out and never came back. That was six months ago.

Fortunately, other partners recognized the stakes and continued to talk in what were tough but constructive discussions. To be clear about the importance of the government's fiscal parameters, we included them in the 2012 Ontario budget and made sure that the 2012-13 grants for students' needs were consistent with what we had asked of our partners.

In support of the ongoing dialogue between our partners and the government, we provided a steady stream of information about our fiscal parameters and their implications for the 2012-13 budgets. These communications were in the form of memos, B memos and teleconferences to the sector that outlined what their obligations were with respect to the parameters when planning their 2012-13 budgets. In every case, we were clear about the necessity and benefits of respecting the parameters.

While some chose to follow the ETFO example and walk away, others persevered and continued to work diligently on behalf of their members and Ontario students. As a result of their hard work and our government's commitment to being firm but fair, focused but flexible, we announced amended fiscal parameters. The amended parameters proposed increasing the number of sick days from six to 10, but not to allow those days to be banked. To ensure all PDT partners were aware of this change, even those who had abandoned the process, we provided details of the change to the entire sector. This marked a turning point in our dialogue with the sector, but not with ETFO, not with OSSTF and not with CUPE.

Those who walked away and were invited back repeatedly continued to turn their back on the government, the PDT process and on their responsibility to act in the best interests of Ontario's students.

Fortunately, others showed leadership, specifically the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. On the night of July 4, we were talking late into the night with OECTA and the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, who were acting on behalf of Catholic boards. We were on the cusp of an agreement between OECTA and OCSTA when the trustees decided to walk away from the process regarding concerns over fair-hiring provisions embedded in the draft agreement. OCSTA made the decision to walk away.

Our government made the decision to pick up the ball that they had dropped. As a result, OECTA signed a memorandum of understanding, or MOU, with our government on July 5, 2012. The memorandum of understanding with OECTA falls within the government's fiscal parameters and benefits from the creativity and innovation that can only be derived from true listening and collaboration. Frankly, what we agreed to with OECTA is better than what we had first come to the table with, and that is because it is a fairly negotiated agreement with input from key education partners.

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While I will get into the specifics of the agreements later, as they form the basis of the proposed legislation before us, I do want to speak to the ways in which the OECTA memorandum of understanding better serves our teachers and our province than the parameters we had originally outlined.

The memorandum stands out for its special consideration for new teachers: their needs at an early stage in their careers and their importance to the growth and sustainability of excellence in the classroom. Young teachers are the fuel that keeps the engines of our education system running. Their energy, enthusiasm and fresh perspectives are exactly what our schools and students need to continue to succeed.

Our initial parameters did not distinguish between new or experienced teachers. As a result, the parameters were seen as particularly challenging for those just starting out in their careers. Our talks with OECTA and the eventual memorandum of understanding helped to reframe our parameters in a way that met our fiscal requirements while still providing supports for our newest teachers. These supports include partial movement through the pay grid and improved sick and maternity leave plans.

The memorandum also includes a fair hiring provision that requires a standardized, consistent and transparent approach to hiring occasional teachers for long-term occasional and permanent positions. Taken together, and in addition to the many other supports we've already provided for new teachers, including reducing the number of days a retired teacher can supply-teach, the memorandum is a clear win for young teachers and, in turn, for the future sustainability of excellence in the classroom.

Despite these clear benefits, among others I will refer to in a moment that are embedded in the proposed legislation, teacher and support staff unions, as well as school boards, spoke out against the agreement. Some other unions declared it was an affront to what they felt they were entitled to. Some boards felt that the status quo was acceptable for hiring practices. But, Madam Speaker, in 2012, for all the economic reasons I have laid out, there is nothing acceptable about the status quo.

Fortunately, other partners accepted that notion, and not long after the OECTA memorandum of understanding, we reached agreements with the Association of Professional Student Services Personnel on July 30 and with the Association des enseignants et des enseignantes franco-ontariens, AEFO, on August 9. These agreements were consistent with the OECTA memorandum in terms of compensation, benefits and savings for the province. With OECTA and AEFO signed to memorandums of understanding, that means the government has reached an agreement with teachers in over half of Ontario's school boards: 41 out of 72 school boards, to be exact. What we needed, then, was for Catholic and French school boards to step up and negotiate locally with their teachers, using the OECTA and AEFO memorandums of understanding as the basis for their discussions.

On August 8, we were proud to announce that the Toronto District School Board passed a motion indicating its intention to sign on to the memorandum of understanding reached between the government and OECTA. On August 22, we made the same announcement about the York Catholic District School Board. On August 23 and 24, Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic School Board, followed by Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board, announced that they too would sign on to the OECTA memorandum of understanding.

That means that all bargaining between OECTA's member in Toronto, York region, Brantford and Sault Ste. Marie will be based on the fair, balanced and responsible parameters set out in the MOU. That is great news. But to put it into perspective, that is only four school boards out of 72, and it is now August 28. As much progress as we have made since we began PDT discussions in February, it is fair to say that we haven't made enough progress for Ontario's parents and students.

I have no doubt that our education partners are committed to the three core goals of education: increasing student achievement and well-being, reducing gaps in achievement for struggling students, and building confidence in the publicly funded education system. But here in the 11th hour, just before September and the start of a new school year, I have come to doubt their understanding of the province's fiscal reality and how, in order to continue to make gains towards the three core goals, this fiscal reality demands sacrifices from all of us. It demands sacrifices from all of us in education, in health care, and across the whole public sector. We must all sacrifice something in order to protect what we cherish the most. A world-leading classroom experience is right at the top of that list for most Ontarians and, more

specifically, for the students, whose best interests must be paramount in any decision we make about education.

Since February, we have been very clear that our government will act in the best interests of those students and that we are willing to make the tough decisions necessary to do what is right on their behalf. So we are here today to stand up for the gains we've made in education since 2003. We are here to stand up for full-day kindergarten and small class sizes. We're here today to stand up for 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs. And after many months of sincere dialogue, where the government has bargained in good faith with each and every one of its partners, after many months of attempts to bring Ontario's biggest teachers' union back to the table and several months of asking others who left to come back, we have come to a point where words must be replaced by actions, where actions need to get results, results to put our students first.

Timing is of critical importance because, as I have mentioned, we are on the cusp of a new school year. The day after Labour Day, parents and students want to know that the school bell will ring and that classes will start. They want certainty, and it is our job to give it to them—certainty for this upcoming school year and certainty that our education system is on a sustainable track for generations to come, which brings me to another powerful motivator for strong action now.

Teacher and support staff contracts expire on August 31. Today is August 28. If new contracts are not in place when the current contracts expire, existing contracts will automatically roll over, resulting in a 5.5% salary increase and two million more bankable teacher sick days that can be cashed out at retirement. This will result in a significant and unaffordable cost to Ontario taxpayers. That's almost half a billion dollars that should be used to educate Ontario students. We cannot let that happen, Madam Speaker. We will not let that happen. So today, I am asking everyone to join us in standing up for schools, students and sustainability by supporting our proposed legislation, the Putting Students First Act.

The Putting Students First Act, if passed, would ensure that school contracts respect the government's fiscal and policy priorities and contain measures to secure two years free from labour disruptions. If passed, the act would require that school boards and local bargaining units of teachers and support staff settle local agreements, consistent with the priorities reflected in the memorandum of understanding between the government and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and similar agreements negotiated before August 31.

Specifically, the proposed act, if passed, would require that parties negotiate or accept local agreements that are consistent with the following provisions and parameters:

- 0% salary increases in 2012-13 and 2013-14;

- allowing grid movement on the 97th day of the school year for 2012-13 and 2013-14;

- all teachers will take a 1.5% pay cut in 2013-14 in the form of three unpaid professional development days so that younger teachers will continue to move through

the grid according to their experience and additional qualifications;

—that we would reach agreement to restructure the grid with a view to long-term sustainable savings;

—the elimination of the current retirement gratuity for payment of unused sick days that was responsible for a \$1.7-billion liability for school boards; and

—a restructured short-term sick leave plan that would include up to 10 sick days. This sick leave plan would benefit younger teachers by providing income protection for serious illness and improved maternity leave provisions.

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If passed, the Putting Students First Act will save the province \$2 billion and will avert an expenditure of \$473 million, and at the same time ensure that we don't take our foot off the pedal of student achievement as we continue to see progress in our schools, and that we roll out full-day kindergarten and keep our class sizes small. These savings would be found while continuing to support student achievement, protecting full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and 20,000 teaching and support staff jobs.

The proposed legislation, if passed with the support of the members in this House, would take effect on September 1 but would provide until December 31, 2012, for school boards, teachers and support staff to engage in local collective bargaining. This would allow the government's education partners to reach agreements that respect local circumstances while also including the parameters set out in the proposed legislation. But it is important to note that where any agreements do not meet the standards of the proposed legislation, I, as Minister of Education, will have the power to withhold approvals, and the parties will risk having agreements imposed.

The proposed legislation also includes a provision that, if passed, would claw back any increases to wages and benefits that occurred between September 1 and the signing of new collective agreements. This means that, should the House fail to act and pass the proposed legislation before September 1, we can still avoid the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars that would occur should teacher contracts expire on August 31 without a new contract being in place.

In addition to the proposed act, the government is prepared to introduce a regulation under the Education Act that will ensure occasional teachers benefit from fair hiring practices in every school board across the province. This will better position Ontario's hard-working and dedicated occasional teachers for long-term assignments or permanent jobs in schools by requiring a standardized, consistent and transparent approach for hiring.

Since February, the government has been working diligently and in good faith to establish a new provincial framework agreement with its education partners, partners like OECTA, partners like l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO, and the Association of Professional Student Services

Personnel, APSSP, who engaged in a constructive dialogue and signed agreements that serve the best interests of the province and their members.

But as I have said, with September just around the corner, many other unions have yet to sign an agreement. As a result, we must now take strong action to provide certainty for students and families that the school year will start as scheduled and will not be interrupted at any time by labour disruptions. We must take action to avoid automatic wage increases. We must take action if we, as politicians elected to act in the best interests of the province and its people, are to have any credibility with the majority of Ontarians, who are not teachers and who have suffered greatly in the past few years as the economy struggled.

If passed, the Putting Students First Act would ensure that the single most important step to growing Ontario's economy, eliminating the deficit and protecting the gains made in education, will not be compromised by labour agreements that do not reflect the province's fiscal reality.

Each and every one of us in this House has an obligation to be responsible stewards of the province's finances. They elected us to protect the services they cherish most, education being right at the top of the list.

They elected us as MPPs in a minority Parliament to work together, to steer our province toward fiscal sustainability. By supporting the proposed Putting Students First Act, we have an opportunity to show Ontarians that their confidence in us has not been misplaced; that we are capable of rising above partisan politics to take action that will make an immediate impact for students, for their families, for young teachers, and for the sustainability of our publicly funded education system, which—make no mistake, Madam Speaker—is the pillar of our economic prosperity.

There is no doubt that we are as committed to making minority government work as we are to keeping our word with those partners who signed agreements with us. That is why we took the rare step of sharing this legislation so far in advance: because we wanted to enlist the opposition's support to ensure timely passage of this important piece of legislation.

Despite the fact that we heard nothing of substance from the third party, we worked with officials over the weekend, reviewing the official opposition's feedback and determining the best path forward.

The Progressive Conservatives indicated that they could not support the diagnostics and fair hiring provisions outlined in the original draft of the bill. This is disappointing for parents, students and our partners. They are not just asking us to move away two provisions that would make our education system even stronger, but they are also asking us to break our road map agreement with OECTA that we arrived at after over six months and 300 hours of discussion. It's a road map that other teachers, including those represented by AEFO, have signed on to. This request puts us in an impossible spot, but I believe that we have found the right balance by introducing a

revised Putting Students First Act that addresses the concerns raised by the PCs, honours the signed memorandums of understanding and reflects the realities of our minority Parliament.

But let me be clear that changes to diagnostic assessments and fair hiring provisions remain a priority for our government, which is why we will instead move forward with non-legislative tools that will allow us to enact these policies. I announced on August 13 that I would be moving forward with a fair hiring regulation and a policy directive on diagnostic assessments, and that will still happen, but it will happen outside of this legislation.

I do want to take some time to clarify some misconceptions around these policies. The increase in use of diagnostic assessments is fairly recent and has been a part of how we've been able to see the progress we've seen in our schools. But it has been made clear to me that while these assessments need to be maintained, we don't currently have the balance right when it comes to the ability of classroom teachers to make decisions about what makes the most sense for the little person sitting in front of them. Our policy and program memorandum will still require that teachers conduct these assessments, but instead of testing for the sake of testing, we'll ensure that these assessments inform the instruction of their students. No teacher will be permitted to opt out.

As for the fair hiring provision, this is an issue that I've heard a lot about from young teachers since I became minister. These are teachers who have completed teachers' college, who have been supply-teaching and on occasional teaching lists for sometimes years and who are not sure of what the process is to be hired on a permanent basis. Currently, there is no consistency and transparency on how new teachers are hired within and between boards.

The agreement we signed with OECTA sets out fair hiring rules that will bring additional transparency and accountability for new teachers so that everyone understands the rules around hiring. This is particularly necessary in a system funded by public dollars, where accountability for decisions is critical. I want to be clear, though: Management will still make the ultimate decision about whom to hire, but that role comes with a responsibility, Madam Speaker, to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood by all. The MOU requires the process to be fair and transparent but contemplates a decision based on the best possible program, the safety and well-being of students, the qualifications of each applicant, an interview process, and seniority—certainly not seniority alone.

I am committed to seeing both of these provisions implemented across the sector and will do so by introducing a regulation in the coming weeks.

I strongly encourage you as colleagues and as Ontarians to move this proposed legislation forward and help us ensure it takes effect before September 1. Doing so will give clarity to families that, come September, school will begin on time and that there will be no labour disruptions at any time—not on the first day; not on any

day. But also, by passing the law expeditiously, we will help facilitate more effective local bargaining, a process this proposed legislation respects and provides room for, while ensuring that the most contentious issues, such as compensation, are already taken care of.

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The best pathway forward exists in the fair, balanced and responsible proposed legislation at hand. We've worked hard for seven months with our partners and never imagined we would be in such a position. But it seems that despite our sincere efforts at the provincial discussion table and the many successes we have had along the way, strong action cannot be avoided, nor should it be. Tough decisions are why we are all here, and getting them right is more important than ever.

As Minister of Education and as a mother of two boys heading into grade 2, I look forward to the support of all members of this House for the Putting Students First Act and the certainty you will all help bring to the new school year.

Madam Speaker, in an effort to see this legislation moved along expeditiously, I would seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding second and third reading of Bill 115.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I heard a no.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Well, Madam Speaker, that is truly disappointing that not all members of this Legislature are willing to stand up right now and put students first. But I do look forward to further debate on this bill.

The proposed Putting Students First Act is a reflection of our government's commitment to protecting the gains we've made in education and to preserve the classroom experience by continuing to roll out full-day kindergarten, keeping class sizes small and protecting 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

I am very concerned to see here today in this House that we do not have the full support of the assembly to move forward with this piece of legislation that would do what matters most: standing by our kids and putting them first.

I would ask the members in this House to rethink their decisions and support our government's initiatives to put students first. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments? The member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this debate and discussion. Of course, I'll have an hour leadoff immediately following this, and I know the NDP will as well.

I have been working with the minister on a number of different items here, and we have decided that what we would do is, well, co-operate as best as we can, given the hand we've been dealt. There's not everything we agree with in this legislation, and we seriously have a lot of concerns which I'll outline at a later point in time.

However, I sent a letter to the minister yesterday with two questions I really will need the answers to. I would

like her to clarify her comments yesterday to the media that the removal of subclauses 19(1)(e)(i) and (e)(ii) will apply for any agreement that has not been signed as of August 31, regardless of which school board is affected.

Secondly, we have a concern in the official opposition, as outlined by our leader, Tim Hudak, on several occasions, with the OECTA road map and the numbers, and so we had asked that the minister commit to ensuring that the Auditor General would review their act to ensure that it achieves the financial targets that they profess it does.

I'm wondering if the minister could respond to us today with answers to those two questions. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions? The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as I have said previously, this is a politically driven bill meant to give the Liberals a boost in two by-elections. I ask the minister—she talks about school starting very shortly, about the need to assure parents that they will be able to take their children to school or make sure the children can get into school—which school boards are not going to be functioning next week? Tell us. Because when I talked to trustees earlier this summer, they were not planning for strikes or lockouts. They were looking at your bill and saying, “What on earth is going on here? What is going on here?”

The minister knows full well that, typically, the negotiations between teachers and education workers and their employers—the boards—occurs at the beginning of the school year. That is common practice. However, what's different this year is a government that is desperate to get a majority; for some reason, seems to have decided that taking this position of creating a crisis will help them win two by-elections; and has thus structured everything around that.

It was interesting to me that for so much of the minister's time, she was not speaking about the bill. She was going on about her assessment of the government's record, her assessment of the situation in the province, but, in fact, the content of the bill was a minor part of her comments.

We were caught up in a political crisis of the government's making, one in which the minister cannot tell us which school boards will not be functioning next week.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions? The member from Nipissing-Pembroke-Renfrew.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's close enough, Speaker. Thank you very much.

Well, I listened very closely to what the minister was saying, and I myself have my reservations about her ability to stick to the bill. But my colleague and our education critic, the member for Nepean—Carleton, has raised a couple of issues, and that's the request for some clarification from the minister on two very, very important points, namely, section 19, subclauses (e)(i) etc., which have a lot to do with who's going to be determining who's going to be hiring the supply teachers and under what criteria. Is it going to be under seniority or is

it going to be under suitability? The fact that she stated that school boards that have not signed on by August 31—will these measures in the current bill be removed?

But I also have my concerns about the motivation and the timing of this legislation. Are the Liberals, on purpose, creating a crisis so that they can play politics with this issue in Kitchener—Waterloo and in Vaughan? Their original statement was that we have to have this bill passed by September 1. Well, given that they didn't get unanimous consent for the motion here earlier, it's highly unlikely that that's going to happen. So what was the critical need?

We're going to bail the government out because we believe that restraint is the order of the day, and we need to go down that road, but I'm always questioning the motives of this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Well, there's spin, and then there's reality. The reality is that the 5,000 teachers and education workers that were on the front lawns offered this government a freeze on their salaries and never threatened to go on strike, but that's not the word that we hear from the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Party is spinning quite a different line and absolutely have created a crisis—a crisis that's going to cost Ontario taxpayers tens of millions of dollars, and here's why: because it's going to be challenged, because it is unconstitutional. That's the reality. It's going to be challenged, and they're going to lose. They're going to lose just like the BC government lost. They lost \$85 million out there. We're looking here at maybe losing as much as \$780 million. That's what this government is doing. That's what they're going to cost the taxpayers of Ontario, and all for a manufactured crisis that doesn't exist. It doesn't exist because this government had eight months to sit down and actually negotiate, and they walked away. An announcement, Madam Speaker, on YouTube does not count as negotiation. Walking away from a table does not count as negotiation.

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So this government, just like they've done in Mississauga and Oakville, will cost the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars to save a seat, which we think they should lose anyway. We're working to that end—trust me—on this side. So here you get Liberal spin that has no basis in reality whatsoever; 5,000 people out on the lawn said as much. So do the press. Anybody who reads beneath the lines for five seconds knows that this is spin. This has nothing to do with students; this has everything to do with the by-election. It's crass and cynical politics, and it hurts our children.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I will say to my friends opposite: This bill has everything to do with students. It has everything to do with protecting the education system that we have built up over the past nine years, an education system that we inherited when we were first

elected that was in disarray, where we had had challenges, we had low test scores and we had low grad rates. Rather, now, test scores are up, grad rates are up, our students are achieving, and people come from around the world to study what we are doing here in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, this bill has everything to do about putting our students first. If we move in this direction and we garner the support of this House, this approach will save Ontario taxpayers more than \$2 billion when applied province-wide over the next two years. It will avert a cost of \$473 million if teachers' contracts automatically roll over and more sick days are accrued. That's \$473 million that we need to spend in our classrooms to support our students, rather than pay additional teacher pay at this time that we can simply not afford.

When we were in good economic times, as I said in my remarks, we proudly paid teachers more. We believe in Ontario teachers. They deliver that top-quality education. But now, at this time in our history, at this time when our province has the fiscal challenges that we have, we must all do our part, and that includes everyone who works across the public sector. That includes our teachers. What we are asking of our teachers is simply to take a pause, and we're asking the members in this House—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The minister concluded her leadoff speech without answering the two questions that I had posed to her. They are very important questions, and in the spirit of co-operation which we have offered in the official opposition, I would like to know if she would clarify that the removal of subclauses 19(1) (e)(i) and (e)(ii) will apply for any agreement that has not been signed as of August 31, regardless of which school board is affected.

Now, Speaker, that's the first question. I'm going to tell you why I'm asking: because Catholic and French school boards who didn't want to be part of the road map want to know, are they left out of the management rights? They deserve to have a clear answer, and we in the official opposition also deserve a clear answer.

In addition, as I progress through where the official opposition stands on this bill, we'll talk a little bit about numbers, and you will recall from the public debate in the media, Speaker, over the OECTA road map that this caucus, the Ontario PC caucus, has severe reservations with the numbers being cited by this minister. We believe there is a \$300-million hole, and I will walk you through that later, but it comes back to the point: If you cannot trust their numbers, shouldn't we have a third party, arm's-length, independent assessment of their numbers?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The auditor.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's why we've asked for the auditor, and that is why we had requested that the minister take the initiative and call him in. I do hope she has a response for me. I have written her a letter. This is an important issue.

Now that I've got that housekeeping out of the way, I would, first and foremost, like to say thank you to those in our education system. By that, I mean I want to say thank you to our teachers. They do a great job, regardless of whether it's junior kindergarten right through to grade 12.

I must say this: I have a daughter who will be going back to school next week in grade 2, and we've had outstanding teachers. I know everyone in this assembly appreciates the work they do. I want to say thank you to school board trustees. I know there are a few former trustees in this place. From time to time, they take the brunt of criticism, or they make decisions in my own community sometimes that I don't understand. That said, for the little recognition they get with a stipend, they do work quite hard. Finally, I'd like to say thank you to Ontario's principals, who are the heads of most of our schools and have an eye into every one of our communities that most of us would like. They get to see students from all walks of life, from any economic background—lots of diversity. They know, for example, what kids are in trouble, who might be going home to no food on the table and whose parents may have lost their jobs.

That's why this bill is actually important to me. This bill is important because it is the first recognition by the Ontario Liberal government that our province has had a very difficult nine years, that we have lost a lot of jobs in this province and that we are spending more on interest alone servicing the debt and the deficit than we are on some government departments. It is a recognition of something my colleagues—in particular our leader, Tim Hudak—have been calling for for years now, which is a legislated, province-wide, mandatory broader public sector wage freeze. We believe in our caucus that that is one of the tools that will get us out of the recession and get this province back on track.

Now, why is that a concern? Well, I just talked about the kids who may be going to school and have had some challenges. I said that my daughter is in grade 2. I recognize, when I go to her Christmas concert, Remembrance Day or even when I volunteer on Fridays, that some kids may be having some struggles at home, given this economy. I've seen kids where the teacher—and I want to say thank you to the teachers who do it—has brought the extra snacks to school for those kids. I've seen it, and it's humbling.

The reality is, we really appreciate having a publicly funded education system, and where I'm getting to the point—and this is my point—is, in order for that public education system to be sustainable, we have to be able to afford it. We have to be able to afford our government in Ontario so that it's not breaking the backs of the moms and the dads who are paying the taxes. For too long, this government has not paid attention to the dire financial situation in our province. They ignored it. They didn't keep up with the times. When other nations, when other provinces, when our own country was hit by recession, they continued to spend at enormous rates that we

couldn't afford. In fact, let me give you a statistic. In fact it's not even a statistic. It's a quote from the finance minister on budget day. He said that the third-largest spending priority outside of health care and education in our province is on the debt and the deficit. Servicing the debt and the deficit in Ontario is larger than every other single government department combined outside of education and health care.

What does that mean? Well, let's continue to walk through. It means that every single dollar spent servicing the debt and the deficit to multinational financiers, many out of this country, in New York, every single dollar being spent to service that debt and the deficit out of this country is a dollar taken away from front-line classrooms, from front-line health care. It's taken away from kids in classrooms.

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In order for this public education system to remain sustainable, in order for us to ensure that we are still building schools in high-growth neighbourhoods, that we've got the right and proper supports for those urban cores—and that we're making sure in our rural communities we're not closing down the only institution that is making that community viable itself by being able to continue to fund it.

Unfortunately, Speaker, and I say this as an unfortunate instance, it means we're going to have to bring in a legislated wage freeze. No one really wants to do that, out of the heart, because we know that people work very hard. The core difference between us and the Ontario Liberal government is that we believe it needs to be applied across the board.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Equally.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Equally to everyone. It needs to be fair, equitable, but it also needs to be comprehensive.

There are 4,000 outstanding collective agreements that still need to be negotiated elsewhere. But in this instance, this Liberal government has chosen to fight with teachers. It reminds me of a fight that they chose to pick just last spring with the doctors. I can't understand why you would pick and choose who should receive a pay cut or a wage freeze or a rollback and who shouldn't. That's why we've asked for a broader public sector wage freeze. We believe, if applied equally across the board, it would save \$2 billion a year and cut that debt and the deficit down so that our core public services that we support in health care and in education would still be there and would be viable and sustainable into the future; this government chose not to. They chose to do the piecemeal approach.

Our leader has been, as you know, for over a year looking for a solution to this crisis. In fact, he met in November with Mr. McGuinty, the Premier of Ontario, and he stated that it was important to bring in a legislated wage freeze. At the time, the Liberals said it was unconstitutional. Number two, we brought forward our own legislation that would have applied equally across all of the government. The Liberals voted that down.

But five weeks before the first day of school, we heard rumblings, chirping, that the government was going to recall the assembly because they now, at the 11th hour, were going to save everyone. They're going to put kids in classrooms and they weren't going to stand for these 5.5% increases that the province couldn't afford.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My colleague from the New Democrats says it's the by-elections.

Now, Speaker, we've had our concerns with the OECA road map. We have been advocates for reining in government spending and balancing the budget so that in the future there is an education system that parents in Ontario can rely on, and that's why we want an across-the-board wage freeze.

In Ontario, we have over 114,000 teachers. In the 2012 Ontario budget, they stated that freezing teachers' wages, including their salary grid, is "necessary if government is to meet its commitment to balance the budget." So the government, at the time—five months ago, six months ago—stated they were going to freeze teachers' wages, including the salary grid, and this is important. Instead of supporting our legislation in May to enact an immediate across-the-board wage freeze for two years, the government chose instead to negotiate a 0% compensation increase, and, to date, it has failed. Despite claims by the government, the recent deal struck with OECA, now part of this legislation, really doesn't constitute a true wage freeze. About 40% of teachers can still move up the salary grid, and it means that close to 18,000 unionized teachers in OECA will receive salary increases of about \$7,000 over two years.

Now, if the government wants to challenge our numbers on this—we're actually just using their numbers—I would encourage them to do what I'd asked the minister earlier. Send in the Auditor General. If you're so confident about your numbers, send in the Auditor General. We would love to hear what Jim McCarter has to say about this.

The problem with their legislation—we will support it, but we have reservations and this is why we want the Auditor General in—is, if this deal is replicated across all unions and all boards, 45,000 teachers in total will continue to move up the grid, representing a cumulative cost of close to \$450 million in salary increases over two years. So it's not a true wage freeze. And the costs won't be fully offset by giving teachers three unpaid days; that will save \$150 million. But given the new \$450-million cost for moving up and down the grid, these folks over on the other side of the assembly will have a \$300-million fiscal gap, a fiscal gap that they said in their own budget they wouldn't have. There's not anything that they submit that is worth the paper it is written on because you always have to read the fine print, and sometimes the fine print isn't even there, because they're not always forthcoming with the truth.

So, with less than a week until collective agreements with teachers automatically renew, the government is now here recalling the assembly, which they also dragged

their feet on, because we heard the rumblings over five weeks. In fact, I called my friend Peter Tabuns. We played a little phone tag. I said, "I'm hearing this is coming." He said, "Well, I'm hearing it, too." I think I may have told the Clerk's office. I asked some Liberals. I was talking about this because the Liberals wouldn't confirm that they wanted to sit, to recall the assembly. So Tim Hudak and I actually said, "Call back the House. You want to put forward a piece of legislation? Great. We have a lot of questions about it, and we wouldn't mind bringing up a few other questions, too, about a power plant in Mississauga and maybe a little helicopter that's Ornge. We wouldn't mind bringing up a few of those issues either."

So we're here, Speaker, and so we are discussing those little Ornge helicopters; and so we are talking about that power plant in Mississauga; and we are talking about getting kids back in classrooms; and we are talking about slaying the debt and deficit; and we are talking about making sure we have a viable and sustainable public education system. However, let's talk a little bit more about motive.

They could have prevented this, had they planned properly. One of my biggest criticisms of the government on this initiative is how they've handled it. It will take a long time to convince me, if ever, that they're doing this for the sake of the children. I find it insulting actually that they would name this bill "Putting Students First," because I think the message that it sends to teachers, principals and trustees is that they don't put students first.

I can tell you something, Speaker: On many occasions, I may not agree with union leaders. In fact, I guess I'm probably known as somebody who stands on the right side of politics, and they may stand on the left side. But I will tell you one thing: I don't believe for a second that Ontario's teachers don't put students first. Any person who walks into a classroom in this province knows that those teachers are there for the children. Albeit, my child is in elementary school, and I've had a great experience with her teachers, Tammy Epp—

Interjections.

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This is the other thing, Speaker. I just have to point this out. This is also a government that cannot take yes for an answer. The reality is, we are going to bail them out and let this bill pass. Yet all they do is they chirp from the sidelines because they can't handle what they've done for the past nine years. They'll heckle—and this coming from the person who mis-managed, Speaker, a \$190-million file as energy minister, and he wants to heckle us about talking about putting students first. That is shameful. I can tell you something: The people watching at home have more questions about that Mississauga power plant, I can assure you, than anything else.

But let me say this, Speaker. We have said that we would see this legislation pass. We have nothing against the teachers. In fact, we have the greatest of respect for them. Our issue is making sure that we do move toward a

broader public sector wage freeze, and we have asked the government on a number of occasions.

Now, the issue in the past couple of days is that the minister has said she would listen to our concerns. We have some serious concerns. We think that—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You guys are making it awfully hard, this conversation between the two.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I don't want to—in any event, Speaker, outside of the fiscal parameters that the government actually believes they've invoked, which I think can be debunked, because that's only a partial issue, is weakening school boards' and principals' ability to hire the best possible staff and ensure that proper assessment and reporting is continued. Don't take our word for it. Take the word of the Catholic trustees' association or the student trustees' association, or the principals' council, who are very concerned with that clause.

So here's where we are, as I walk you through where the PC caucus is—where we are. The minister called me and said to me she would be tabling legislation, a few weeks ago. I said, "Thank you. I'd like a briefing immediately." I'm still waiting for the briefing. I said, "I also have some questions for you, Minister, with respect to your fiscal parameters." You're going to love this.

Mr. Paul Miller: I want to hear it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I sent a letter immediately after the conversation I had with the minister, before she made it to the media that she was going to put this legislation forward. You'll like this. So I sent her the letter. A couple of days later, she tells the media that the Conservatives haven't responded to her legislation. They were asking no questions. Can you believe that? I sent her a letter.

In fact, I was actually quite friendly to her. I couldn't believe for a second that she wouldn't respond. In fact, I wrote to her right on August 16 at 12:13 p.m. So, Peter, Mr. Tabuns, I think you and I had a conversation about 11 o'clock that day. I spoke with the minister maybe a little bit before that.

So I wrote her a letter. I said, "Thank you for the call. I appreciated the notice that you will be announcing your legislation later today. It would be helpful if I could have a technical briefing today when the bill arrives to my constituency office and one at a later date for our senior staff once the Ontario PC caucus retreat is over." Because why? They decided to make this announcement while our two caucuses were having our retreats. They were in Kitchener. Our caucus was in Niagara.

I said again, "I'd like to know, if you plan on introducing this legislation, if it will be a confidence measure. Also as I've indicated, I have several technical questions regarding the OECA road map. I wish we could have gotten more through them before the call was over. But I appreciate the offer to send them to Gabrielle to be answered before I receive a copy of the legislation this afternoon." Then I asked a series of questions.

I didn't receive a response until the minister went to the media saying that I hadn't written her a letter, I hadn't given her feedback, I hadn't asked any questions. It was not until I handed over to Jonathan Jenkins from the Sun and said, "I sent this letter. I've asked for several responses and none have been forthcoming," did I actually receive a response.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, it is a friendly paper if you tell them the truth, and unfortunately, when you're not telling the truth over there, Mr. Bradley, the reality is that you get a little bit burned.

So we get our response back, and then the minister calls again and says, "We're going to be recalling the House and we're going to be putting forward the legislation." I said, "Fine."

Hon. Brad Duguid: So you called Peter right away.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: No, I didn't call Peter right away. I—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Sorry, Peter. I didn't call you right away.

But the reality is that, on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I spoke to the minister and I said, "Look, we'll pass this bill, and what we'll do is take a good, hard look at it. We're going to run the numbers again. You've got my word." Therefore, we spoke with the minister, and she told us, this past Monday, that she was going to make some concessions. We asked for subclauses 19(1)(e)(i) and 19(1)(e)(ii) to be removed from the bill, to restore and empower the authority of school boards and principals.

Then, of course, no sooner did she say that she was going to do that and we'd be happy, than she comes out and speaks to the media and tells us that she doesn't have a response for us, that she is thinking about putting them in regulations. Now there is an awful lot of mixed messaging—not a lot of clarity for the school boards or the principals or, for that matter, us.

I know that the minister's staff are here, so I would hope that they can answer by email today if the Catholic and the French boards are going to be left out of the management rights amendments, if they're going to stick to their word and ensure that 19(1)(e)(i) and 19(1)(e)(ii) will be eliminated. Speaker, we think that that is critical for a solid bill that will work in the best interests of the people of Ontario. We think that it is the best way to proceed with this legislation. We feel that this bill needs to be passed as soon as possible, but we also still feel we'd like to continue to be at work.

Next week, students across Ontario will be going back to school, but the bottom line is still this: After nine years of reckless spending, we're still going to have a deep financial hole, one that will continue to strangle our public education system. I maintain—and I know my colleagues do—that the OECTA deal alone is just one example of a larger problem in Ontario. It's a symbol of Ontario's debt, our crisis in the deficit and debt slaying,

and the challenges that they've now presented with their own stakeholders.

In fact, I've said to the Ottawa Citizen and other media that this had to have been a master stroke of alienation. I am surprised that in one fell swoop this government has been able to alienate the teachers who have given them three back-to-back-to-back elections, the school board administrators who are going to have to carry out and implement this bill—and they can't stop—they cannot help themselves—trying to alienate the opposition parties.

The reality is, Speaker—and I'm sure you're aware of this—last October 6 they weren't elected in a majority government. I'm sure you know that it was a minority government that was elected on October 6. But, for the life of them, they forget that. They forget from time to time that they have to work with others to get things done, to legislate, and when we say "We'll work with you," they can't take yes for an answer. In fact, they want to play silly little games. They want to disenfranchise even people who are willing to tolerate their silliness.

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But that said, we view this legislation for the first time as recognition by this Liberal government that they're in a deep financial hole and they won't be able to spend on full-day learning; they won't be able to spend on class sizes; and they won't be able to spend on new schools if we continue to dig ourselves deeper into a fiscal hole. The money isn't there.

For the first time, the Ontario PC caucus is actually pleasantly surprised that they're taking the notion of a legislated wage freeze seriously. Tim Hudak has been very clear that he doesn't want to derail a school year. In fact, we would appreciate no disturbances whatsoever, so that kids can be in the classroom, so that they can learn, so that they can enjoy not just the educational environment but the social environment that is so important, particularly in those early years. But this government has made a complete mess out of the negotiations. In fact, they had to take over a school board earlier today to get them to sign on to the MOU in Windsor, in Mr. Duncan's riding. It's interesting.

So, here we are today, Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus bailing out Dalton McGuinty and that Liberal sinking ship over there. They rejected our call in November for a public sector wage freeze. They failed to negotiate a deal. Only five of 72 boards have reached agreements, and as I mentioned, one of those came today because they had to take the board over.

Now the Liberals have frantically recalled the Legislative Assembly. Now they're threatened by classroom chaos. They now have finally agreed, at least partially, to a wage freeze for teachers but not everyone. They decided to single out and pick on teachers and single out and pick on doctors. But they could have done it differently. We have the road map, and we're going to continue to pursue it across the board.

In fact, our leader has been very clear in the last week that we've got a plan to fix, freeze and reduce, starting by

freezing public sector salaries to save that \$2 billion annually. Speaker, I ask you: How many schools would be built in Ontario with \$2 billion? How quickly could we get our debt and deficit under control with \$2 billion a year? How many MRIs, hospitals, how many doctors, nurses and teachers could you ensure were working and getting paid with \$2 billion?

Well, the reality is, this government has spent us into oblivion. This bill, we maintain—although it will pass with our support—I want to reiterate, is just a band-aid solution. That is all. It is only a band-aid solution. The Liberals handed our keys over to the education system for the past nine years. They gave increases that this province couldn't afford and spending went up, but enrolment went down and outcomes haven't gotten any better.

If our province wasn't facing a \$411-billion debt and a \$30-billion deficit, this Liberal government would still be throwing money at a problem because they are hardwired—and I repeat, hardwired—to spend money that is not theirs, and they've done it for the past nine years.

So, Speaker, we are going to ensure that kids will be in the classrooms in September. We're going to ensure that they have a trouble-free environment in the fall and for the next two years. We know that this bill will prevent a 5.5% immediate increase in wages, it will outlaw strikes and it will prevent lockouts.

As I mentioned, we are still concerned with the \$300-million fiscal gap in their plan. They could remedy that if they would just talk to the Auditor General and he could prove that their numbers are right. However, this is also a government that thought they were going to balance the books a few years ago and ended up with—what was it?—a \$25-billion deficit. So we don't have a lot of hope that they can get that right.

We know, for example, that there are concerns with our stakeholders over supply teacher hiring and student testing. We have indicated very sharply, very clearly, very emphatically that this is unacceptable to us, and we've asked for changes that would restore school boards' and principals' ability to hire the best possible staff and ensure that proper assessments are done. Now, the minister, as I said, indicated that she would support our changes, yet she was quoted in the media saying one thing compared to what she had said to us.

Now, Speaker, I have a nickname for the Premier. I call him the fine-print Premier. I know, after being in this place for three elections over a period of close to seven years, that you always have to read the fine print with this government, so I'm reading the fine print, and that's why I'm seeking clarification and that is why I am, frankly, disappointed. After her leadoff speech today, in questions and comments I asked her two very specific questions, questions that should have come as no surprise to her because I had submitted them to her in writing yesterday. She was unable to answer the questions. Then immediately when I began to speak, she walked out of the room so that she couldn't even engage me in questions and comments.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

That is a big issue for us.

Now, where do we go from here? Well, we're going to continue to press for amendments and we're going to continue to call for a legislated wage freeze for the entire broader public sector. We're going to ensure that at committee hearings we put forward those amendments, and we're going to continue to call on the minister to bring in the Auditor General to review their numbers, because we know McGuinty math means two plus two equals 250 million bucks in the hole. That is how they add over there. I don't know where they get those calculators, but, Speaker, that is effectively where we are today.

Just to recap today's speech and our feeling in the official opposition on this whole mess, it could have been done differently. It could have been done easily. It could have been done with a phone call from the minister to myself to open up the lines of communication. In one master stroke of alienation, this minister was able to alienate the teachers who have given her three elections, the school boards who have to implement this, and the assembly members here in the official opposition and the third party who they require to pass their legislation. The height of arrogance is now being displayed by the members opposite. They have become what most governments wish not to become, and that is entitled.

Speaker, she could have contacted us and we could have been more collaborative. In fact, the minister then told us that the real issue here was that she had spent 300 hours on an MOU, without understanding that she needs 37 members from the official opposition to pass her bill. The reality is that we're going to continue to pressure her as we proceed with this legislation.

The Ontario PCs will continue our call for a broader public sector wage freeze. This legislation proves we have been right all along. It's exactly what we've been saying. It is constitutional. Poor old Dwight Duncan has been saying one thing for a year now, and now he has to flip-flop on that, but it's true. It is constitutional, it is legal, and that's why we'll support whatever type of wage freeze they're putting in right now, because it speaks to the need to get our costs in this province under control. But as I said—and I'm glad the finance minister is here—it is only part of a bigger problem. There are still 4,000 collective agreements outstanding in Ontario, and while we might be making a bit of progress—and I emphasize, underline, underscore, italicize and bold “a little bit of progress”—there is still much more to do.

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So we're still concerned, but we are willing to work together to make this legislation work. We are willing to work to make sure that we get our debt and our deficit under control. We are willing to work to ensure that our education system is viable into the future, that we can afford to pay teachers, and we are willing to make sure that kids are in classrooms starting next week.

But, Speaker, I have to say this: We're not going to sit by and watch this Liberal government make parents and their kids pay the price for their continued mismanagement. We're happy we're here. There's more to go, and I must say, we are so pleased to be here because not only can we pass this legislation and make sure the kids are in school, not only can we bail out the Liberals and their rotten fiscal plan, but we can also get to the bottom of that nasty scandal at Ornge being presided over by the Minister of Health and, of course, talk about that energy scandal over in Mississauga where the previous Minister of Energy squandered \$190 million—\$190 million they shredded through the paper shredder because they were not prepared to do their due diligence. In fact, the question I asked—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Sorry to interrupt. Would the House please come to order?

I recognize the member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker.

You know, it has not been a very good month for the Liberals. I can understand why they're very upset, because today they had 5,000 of their former friends out front protesting them—5,000 friends. I actually went out to meet with them. I talked to Sam Hammond. You know, the reality is—and my buddy over here, Mr. Tabuns, will tell you—the difference between us and the Liberals is that we know where we stand and we let people know where we stand. We don't double-cross them. We don't tell them one thing and then do another. We don't stab them in the back after they deliver three back-to-back-to-back governments for them. No, we didn't do that. So I could walk out there today to talk to the union leaders, to talk to CUPE, to talk to ETFO, to talk to OSSTF, and I'll tell you why: because I've been clear with them about where we stood all along; because we have mutual interests in protecting students and making sure we put them first. There are some labour issues that our caucus philosophically, ideologically and otherwise does not agree with, but we've been upfront with them. We've never lied to them like this government has lied to them.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Nepean—Carleton to withdraw her unparliamentary remark.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke to also withdraw his unparliamentary remark.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You still make the unparliamentary remark. First—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. And I would—

Interjection: Withdraw.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker, for that. I was getting very excited about all of the—well, let's just put it this way: If there were a wire and there were pants, they'd be hanging on a wire—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry. I have to ask the member from Nepean—Carleton to withdraw her unparliamentary remark.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I was just repeating something I learned in school when I was a little kid.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): No, you have to say, "I withdraw."

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh, sorry, Speaker. I withdraw. Any insult that was intended, I apologize for. But it was still intended.

The reality here is that we are going to continue on debate. We have now reduced this assembly into what's happened here at this particular moment.

I will reiterate for one last time that Tim Hudak and the Ontario PCs will bail this government out. We'll make sure that they can finish the job, because they couldn't do it alone. We've got our ideas and we're going to continue to advocate them. We'll use this time wisely, as the people of Ontario want us to. We will ask the tough questions, not only about this legislation, but on Brad Duguid's \$190-million power plant. We'll ask those tough questions on Dwight Duncan's \$30-billion deficit and we'll ask those tough questions on Deb Matthews's Ornge helicopter scandal. We're going to take our time and study this legislation and put forward meaningful amendments, but we're going to ensure that our kids are in the classroom come next week.

Speaker, thank you very much. I look forward to some enlightening questions and comments. I do hope, however, that the Minister of Education could provide me with the answers and the clarification that I've requested regarding this legislation. I would also encourage the members opposite that when another political party, without any conditions, says, "We'll pass your legislation," try your best not to alienate them. You're doing a great job of alienating everyone, and no one can quite figure out why. So if you could also answer that question, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, it really amazes me sometimes when I sit in this House and I listen to the dialogue. You've got one side, they're at each other all the time—90% of the time—and then all of a sudden there's one issue that they, I guess, can agree on. I don't know why, but they do. All of a sudden they're going to hang each other and then, the next day, when it's all said and done, they're back at it again on opposite sides of the fence. It's amazing. But when you look at it, it certainly is a political move by both of them.

Let's face it, folks. We've got two by-elections, and we've got this party which created a crisis that didn't need to be created to get popular support from the public. And then we've got another group over here that's jumping on the same wagon driving down the same street to get more public cuts to attack the big bad unions. But then, what kills me the most is when the party across says, "We're for collective bargaining."

I do recall a few, and the last few things were called "essential services." My fear is, Speaker, that everything's going to become essential services that they can get their hands on and everyone will be forced back to work and collective bargaining will go out the window.

So when this party over there, the government, says, "We're for collective bargaining," that's a load of malarkey. And when this group over here says, "We're with you as long as you're screwing the unions," that's good. So here we go.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw his unparliamentary—

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll withdraw that word and say that when they're joining in to attack the unions, they jump right in.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't know. When I was outside I didn't see any Liberal members out there to face the teachers who they say are partners and they love them. I didn't see one Liberal out there, but all of the NDP were out there. We were proud to walk out there. So it's really amazing, Speaker, really amazing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I just want to kind of calm things down a little bit here. I did listen intently to my colleague the member from Nepean—Carleton. I get an opportunity to serve with her on a committee and we always have great discussions about parliamentary process.

1740

But I want to take my one minute and 42 seconds this afternoon just to thank the teachers of the province of Ontario. My wife, of course, is an elementary principal at St. Patrick's in Peterborough. My son is going into high school next week, Holy Cross in Peterborough. My daughter is going into grade 8 in St. Anne's. I know a lot of teachers, and the passion and commitment that they bring to the classroom each and every day is something to admire and thank what they do, because it is a challenging job.

I want to think that over the last eight years, you know, we've made strategic investments in education. Don't take my word for it. Outside agencies have come to Ontario to say that we have one of the best public education systems in the world right here in Ontario—something we need to celebrate, right here in Ontario. We've been doing that about making those strategic investments. In fact, Arne Duncan, who is President Barack Obama's education secretary, has come to On-

tario on at least five occasions, I'm told, to see such progressive initiatives like full-day kindergarten, which is going to be the model for the world. He said, "I've got to come up to Ontario. I've got to see the great things you're doing in Ontario because I want to provide some advice to the President of the United States on investments in public education." So that's where we've been coming from the last eight years.

We have a challenge, I recognize that, over the next two fiscal years, 2012-13, 2013-14. We're really asking our partners to come together as we continue this journey, our two great families of public education in the province of Ontario—our Catholic family and our public family—two great approaches to education, something that is recognized around the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Glad to be still here. Listen, I was here like the rest of you listening intently to my colleague from Nepean—Carleton, our very, very capable, hard-working education critic, Lisa MacLeod. She's raised a couple of things that are very, very important. One of them was, how about enlisting the help of the auditor to determine the validity and the accuracy of the numbers that this government purports to be the facts? That's always a real concern with this government. They throw numbers out there, they talk about them being the facts, and then we find out later that they invented the numbers. They make them up.

But we do believe there's a \$300-million hole in their budget here with regard to the costs of this agreement that they've signed with OECTA. If it's taken across the broad spectrum of all boards across the province, it will add up to at least \$300 million. So we have that concern there.

Another thing that we are very, very concerned about—we think that, you know, now the cat's out of the bag here, folks, you can't stand on one issue and say we're freezing the wages of teachers across this province, and then not be willing to stand up in your place and do the right thing and freeze the wages of every public sector employer in this province, across the board. It's time to take bold action.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, has said we will freeze the wages of public sector workers. Over there, what did you do? Ninety-eight per cent of managers can factor that as a salary increase now. They get a bonus. Shame on you. It's time to man up.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further questions and comments? The member for—Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: How could you forget me so fast? I don't get it.

I enjoyed the speech made by the member from Nepean—Carleton. Tories are always very clear about these things, and I love to hear them, because when they whack people, they whack them good. There is no ambivalence about how they do it.

My worry is with the Liberals. I am worried about you. I've told you this often. I worry about you all the

time. Why it is that the Minister of Education called John Snobelen for advice beats me. I don't get that. Of all the people to call, why John Snobelen? You remember the man. He loves horses. But you remember the man when he created a crisis in education. That's not the person you want to get advice from if you're a Liberal, because you need to appear as if you're good with teachers. And by the way, this strategy—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Hold on, hold on. Listen to the two minutes.

This strategy of going after teachers is not getting you any votes. Listen to me. You're trying to get Tory votes. You're not going to get them because Tories are saying they can do it better than you. And the teachers are saying to you, "You're losing me," and you have. You've lost half of the teachers already.

I don't quite understand your political strategy. You're not going up in the polls; you're going down. It's amazing, once you've made a decision to go in a certain direction, you keep doing the wrong thing.

Furthermore, it's interesting that OSSTF has been saying all along. "Look, we're willing to bargain." In fact, they were accepting a pay freeze voluntarily, but that's not good enough for Tories. I understand that. But it's not good enough for Liberals either. That they should do this voluntarily and the government should say, "No, that's not good enough. We're going to make you take a salary freeze," is beyond me. I can't help you. I really can't.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Nepean—Carleton has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to thank, in order of when they spoke, my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, my colleague from Peterborough, my seatmate from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and my colleague from Trinity—Spadina.

In my first set of debates here in this assembly, when I was first elected, Mr. Marchese was speaking. He was the then education critic, and he was remarking about a young fellow who used to be a Liberal MPP, but he wasn't around in those days: Gerard Kennedy. He was off running for something. I wonder what Gerard Kennedy would say today.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: God bless.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Good gosh.

Speaker, it has been a pleasure to address the assembly today on the Ontario PC position on this legislation, our concerns with it and, of course, those critical two other scandals that have brought us back to this assembly: Ornge and that \$180-million power plant.

I will leave this with the government: We are still concerned about the removal of section 1, subsection (2), subsections e(i) and e(ii). We want to ensure that they are removed from this legislation and that they will apply for any agreement that is not signed as of August 31, 2012, regardless of which school board is affected. We want to know, are Catholic boards and French boards left out of

the management right amendments? The minister must be clear on this.

In addition, we have poked holes, using the government's own numbers, in their fiscal plan. We know this is going to cost them \$450 million to execute. There are only \$150 million in offsets. That leaves a gaping \$300-million hole, and that's why we believe the Auditor General needs to be brought in to review their numbers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to start off by noting that I'll be splitting my lead on this particular bill.

It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk about Bill 115. I want to address different significant elements, both of the bill and of its impact in this society—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm sorry to interrupt, but you do need to tell us with whom you are going to split your time.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm splitting it with Andrea Horwath, the leader of our party.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Oh, you forgot her name.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): You may continue.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Bradley, you're being mischievous; you know that—as you often are, sir, as you often are.

Madam Speaker, I had an opportunity to speak briefly to this bill yesterday and I want to start out talking about what I think is the most significant risk that this government's initiative poses for the parents, the families, the people of Ontario, and that's that this bill risks being found unconstitutional and thus risks damages in the tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars for this province.

As others have argued and I am going to argue now, this bill comes forward because this Liberal government believes that it could be advantageous to it in two by-elections in this province. It has looked at the polling and decided that looking tough in dealing with teachers, with education workers, will play to their advantage.

1750

Now, I actually happen to think that the member from Trinity—Spadina is probably correct and that they have misread where the public is at. But, Speaker, I'm not here to actually help the Liberal Party. I'm here to point out the failings in their initiatives. There's no question that this party has a record of doing this kind of thing: setting up a problem, addressing it in some very expensive way, and leaving the bill with the people of Ontario.

If we go back—and I think the member from Nepean—Carleton mentioned this, and I think my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek mentioned this—this government decided to put a privately owned gas-fired power plant in Mississauga. Our party said that these private power deals are risky, expensive and not good ideas. Our critic and our leader at the time, Mr. Hampton, said that this was an expensive and risky option. But this government, having made the decision in the first place, in the midst of an election, because it wanted to save seats, cancelled that plant. So you made an initial error,

you compounded the cost, and you hit the people of Ontario.

You have a record of doing that, and that is what we're looking at again today. We are looking at risks in the tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of dollars. Speaker, that is reckless and that is cynical. This government needs to make it clear to the people of Ontario that it is rolling dice with their budgets and their future with this bill, and it continually tries to obscure that.

Today, it was very clear that the minister had a problem with credibility on the constitutionality of that bill. She had a backbencher set up to ask a question on constitutionality. Why? Because when the government is having difficulty in the media, having difficulty with the public, they try to have a conveniently placed question, a softball, lobbed to a minister so they can express the talking points of the day. So the member from Windsor, Teresa Piruzza, got up to ask the Minister of Education, "Is it true that this bill is constitutional, or are those allegations that it's unconstitutional correct?" No clearer signal can be given that the government is getting hit on this issue—no clearer indication at all.

I had asked the minister previously, "Show us the legal opinion. What's the secret?" If you've got a legal opinion showing that you're in the clear, if you've got several showing that you're in the clear, bring it up. Put it on the table. Let the people of Ontario see it. It hasn't been produced—has not been produced. So I have to say to you, Speaker, that this minister knows that, at the very least, she's got a credibility problem in talking to the people of Ontario and talking to the media of Ontario, who understand that she is rolling the dice with very big stakes for the people of this province.

If you look at the legislation itself and the potential constitutional and legal problems with it—and I have to say that the minister didn't address any of this; I think she needs to. This bill goes well beyond any general wage restraint legislation or back-to-work legislation that has previously been brought forward in Ontario. It singles out a particular group in the public sector.

It's interesting that the Liberals are, in fact, following the Conservative lead. Conservatives are being quite serious when they say, "They're following our lead, and we're bailing them out." They may have legal problems because they're singling out one group.

This bill gives cabinet, rather than the Legislature, the right to restrict strikes and lockouts. Substantial legal questions here: It intrudes into the collective bargaining process by allowing cabinet, by regulation, to impose terms into collective agreements even if there's been a memorandum with the government, thereby changing the agreement reached.

This is substantial power, reaching into agreements that have been freely negotiated. This government, when it gets serious about bringing down the hammer, doesn't seem to hesitate for a moment.

The bill goes well beyond any prior attempt by the provincial government to constrain collective bargaining.

The authority given to the minister and cabinet effectively enables them to control both the process of bargaining and the results of bargaining, including the right to strike or lock out, and imposing collective agreements or their forms without any accountability to the Legislature. So all of you in here who are going to get a chance to vote know that you are delegating huge power to the cabinet. We are being asked to sign a very big blank cheque. So ask yourselves: Do you trust this cabinet with that blank cheque? I ask the Conservatives: Do you trust this government, this cabinet, with that blank cheque? Aside from sitting ministers who would like to be seen well by their Premier, is there anyone else in this room who thinks that giving the Premier a blank cheque is a good idea? I don't.

The act interferes with the collective bargaining process set out under the Labour Relations Act on significant matters, such as wages and sick leave. It violates rights to freedom of association under section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The act seeks to shield the actions of cabinet from any review by the courts, the labour board or boards of arbitration, in contravention of a legal concept as basic as the rule of law.

I have to say, Speaker, when I talk to those who work in this area of law, they are consistently taken aback by the extensive and unfair nature of what is being done.

I say to parents who are concerned about their schools and students, who recognize the work that teachers and other education workers have done, who know that people give it their all: This extraordinarily unfair piece of legislation is not something that reflects their values, does not reflect how they feel about those who have done so much for their children, so much for this community.

When the Supreme Court overturned a legislated wage freeze for 9,000 health care workers in BC, it cost the people of BC \$85 million. There are 10 times as many teachers in Ontario, and costs could easily reach \$780 million.

I will quote a well-known politician in these matters, a Mr. Dalton McGuinty, in fact. In the spring, the Liberals opposed a Progressive Conservative private member's bill to legislate a wage freeze. What did Premier McGuinty say? I'm assuming he was given sage advice by some of his legal advisers.

"I would recommend to them"—the PCs—"that they take a look at a particular decision that dealt with a measure adopted by the British Columbia government. They went ahead in the approach being recommended by my colleague. That matter was taken to court. It involved 9,000 employees." Mr. McGuinty goes on, "It ended up costing BC taxpayers \$85 million because of a mistake made by the BC government.

"We have 1.2 million public sector employees, and I hesitate to think of the cost that would flow from this mistake were we to adopt this particular approach." Dalton McGuinty, May 31, 2012.

It seems to me, Speaker, that Premier McGuinty has turned his back on the advice that he gave us here in the Legislature and turned his back on the advice of sage legal counsel who looked at that private member's bill.

1800

Speaker, you seem eager to—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being 6 of the clock, pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

POWER PLANTS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Nipissing has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy earlier today concerning the costs of the Oakville power plant. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. I'll recognize the member in a moment. We'll just allow members who wish to leave the chamber.

The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, the overspending of this government has left no area of the province untouched, and Ontario's energy sector is no different. In fact, some of the most careless and egregious uses of taxpayer dollars by Dalton McGuinty are tied directly to energy. Today, I called on the energy minister to come clean now on the hidden costs associated with their disastrous energy policy decisions. This isn't just the Mississauga and Oakville power plant cancellations, but the multiple lawsuits and the potential payout of microFIT contracts.

Enough is enough. Ontarians are sick and tired of hearing about the newest way this government has found to squander their hard-earned tax dollars. The minister has had plenty of chances to be upfront with Ontarians about these costs, but he has ducked and dodged at every turn. He failed to table documents requested by the Standing Committee on Estimates surrounding the Mississauga and Oakville power plant cancellations this past spring. Yesterday my caucus colleague from Cambridge, who sits on the estimates committee, rose to raise a point of privilege, calling for the minister to be found in contempt of this Legislature. While we await the Speaker's ruling on this, is this what it's come to in Ontario?

Real leaders take responsibility. They're accountable. This minister has failed us on both. First the minister failed to table the documents with the committee within the acceptable time frame and did not table what was

requested. When he did table documents, they were incomplete and not what we had requested. As a further example of his contempt for his fellow parliamentarians, he has still failed to table the Oakville power plant documents. I believe most Ontarians find that unacceptable and obstructionist.

Speaker, I am absolutely convinced, I am unbelievably positive that \$190 million is not the final bill for the Mississauga power plant cancellation, which the government has admitted in estimates committee was done—and I'm quoting—"in reaction to overwhelming community opposition" prior to the last election campaign. This is \$190 million, Speaker, for not one megawatt of power—for a cancellation.

This government has now sole-sourced the new power plant in Lambton for over \$300 million. Without competing bids, how do we know this is a fair price for the taxpayers? Meanwhile, a settlement between the province and TransCanada Corp. for cancellation of the Oakville power plant could be as high as \$1 billion, according to insider estimates. Again, we have no idea, because the minister refused to provide any documents related to this when asked by the committee and failed to meet the deadline to do so. In fact, this morning, when I asked him in this Legislature again about the Oakville power plant, no answers were given, which brings us here this evening.

I would say to the minister: What are you failing to disclose to us? Ontarians have a right to know. This government is now facing numerous legal actions over their helter-skelter decisions in the energy sector, including a couple of \$1-billion-plus lawsuits. It's just another example of their overspending and careless use of taxpayer dollars. Their poor planning and unrealistic subsidy promises are coming home to roost.

Now the newest bill to come due is the payout by the Ontario Power Authority, which is set to run up as it purchases back microFIT contracts. These are from renewable power developers that Hydro One was unable to connect to the grid due to the lack of transmission capacity.

This minister needs to tell us today: How much more money will be wasted on that mistake, what is the true cost of the Oakville power plant, and when will this sideshow end?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Richmond Hill has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in this House and speak in response to a question raised by the member from Nipissing on revealing the cost of the Oakville power plant.

The need for the Oakville power plant was identified in the year 2006, when the demand projection for electricity in that area was quite high, actually. Since then, the Ontario Power Authority identified that the future needs of the electricity and the power for the region had been met by the transmission solutions in the area. So on October 7, 2010, the Ontario government and

our ministry listened to the residents of Oakville and made a specific commitment to cancel the proposed natural gas power plant in Oakville. This commitment was made in response to concerns raised by a number of members of the community and also people who were advocating for the cancellation or relocation of this power plant which was proposed to be built in Oakville. Our decision to cancel this power plant in Oakville was supported by local community groups, by advocacy groups and by the opposition parties.

For example, Madam Speaker, the member from Halton, on June 1, 2010—I'm just quoting from Hansard—stated that “The people of Oakville have told you they don't want the proposed gas-fired power plant ... and I agree with them.”

The member from Halton, in a press release on September 14, 2010, stated, “Minister, will you move the Oakville power plant? ... I'm asking the minister to consider moving this plant.”

The NDP member from Hamilton Centre, and the leader of the NDP, stated—again I'm quoting from Hansard, Madam Speaker—“New Democrats actually have thought for a long time that that plant should never have been built, and we've said so.”

These are quotes from the members of the opposition. The fact is that both opposition parties have known that cancellation of this plant is going to cost; it's not going to be cost-free. This is quite obvious.

In order to continue the discussion with the proponent, which was TransCanada, the Ontario Power Authority has been continuing negotiation and discussion with TransCanada. As long as this conversation and this negotiation is continuing, we will not be able to reveal any information, because this is not in the interests of the taxpayers; it's not in the interests of Ontarians. Once the negotiations are finalized, as in the case of the Mississauga power plant, the information will be provided.

1810

POWER PLANTS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Leeds–Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy concerning the cancellation of the Mississauga and Oakville power plants. The member has up to five minutes for this.

Mr. Steve Clark: This morning, I asked the Minister of Energy a very straightforward question about the political decision to cancel the Oakville and the Mississauga power plants. The Liberal campaign brain trust, knowing that those seats were in jeopardy, picked up the phone in the dying days of last fall's campaign and ordered the Premier to pull the plug on the Mississauga power plant, the same play that the government played in Oakville before that.

In doing this, Speaker, the Premier proved that this is a government that is willing to do anything or say anything to get elected. Despite knowing this crass, politically

motivated move would throw hundreds of millions of hard-working taxpayers' money down the drain, Premier McGuinty did it anyway.

I know that the Minister of Energy can't undo the damage that's been done from this shocking Liberal seat-saver program because the money's gone and he can't change history. He can't undo the costs that are only going to put Ontario on track for a \$30-billion deficit and an embarrassing \$411-billion debt.

But he does have an opportunity, and the parliamentary assistant has an opportunity to come clean with the people of Ontario, who deserve to know why they're paying hundreds of millions of dollars for two power plants that didn't and won't produce a single megawatt of energy.

When I'm out over the summer going to events in Leeds–Grenville, people ask me: “How did things get so bad in the province of Ontario?” We were once the economic engine of this country and now, under that government, we're the caboose.

Well, you know, Speaker, you don't have to look much past the decision on these two power plants to get an answer to the question. This is a government that's become so hard-wired to wasting taxpayers' money that they do so to save Liberal MPPs' jobs. It's just another day at the office for this Premier.

I noticed this morning that the minister bragged about the fact that he kept the lights on during the record heat wave this summer. Well, you know, I'm glad the lights stayed on too, but it wasn't because of any stroke of any policy genius from the Minister of Energy. The sad reality is that we've got 600,000 fewer Ontarians working these days that demand that power, and power obviously was used a lot less than when the McGuinty government first took office.

We've heard this morning that the cost of pulling the plug on the Mississauga plant alone was \$190 million—this, after the finance minister had to correct the Minister of Energy because the original math that they gave was \$10 million off. So, it just shows how bad things are in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario when you're adding up the government waste and mismanagement: \$10 million to you is just a rounding error. It's sad and disgraceful.

Our energy critic, the member for Nipissing, has said that the figure to cancel the Oakville plant could be anywhere between \$300 million and could reach \$1 billion. When we talk about government waste, I think it's important to bring it down to something every Ontarian can relate to. How many nursing home spaces could we have created with these funds? How many MRIs or any other medical procedures could we have done?

The true cost of that decision is shameful because we have to remember that every dollar frittered away by the McGuinty government, whether it's on eHealth, Ornge, this seat-saver program, is another dollar stolen from front-line services. That's really what's tragic here, and tragic in our question period debate today.

At a time when this government is cutting services Ontarians rely on because of their fiscal crisis it created,

how could they treat funds entrusted to them by taxpayers with such complete disregard?

Speaker, I understand why our leader, Tim Hudak, and our party, the Ontario PC Party, were asking these questions in the House today. Our Ontario taxpayers deserve to know who made these decisions, how much they're going to cost and when in fact they were made.

I'm proud of my colleague from Cambridge with his point of privilege. I know the Speaker is going to rule, and I'm looking forward to hearing the parliamentary assistant talk about why we've had lame excuses on what these power plants have cost Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Madam Speaker, again it's my pleasure to rise in this House in response to the question raised by the honourable member from Leeds–Grenville on the Mississauga power plant cancellation—actually, relocation of the Mississauga power plant.

We made this decision, again, in consultation with the public. The people of Etobicoke and the people of Mississauga didn't want this power plant. When the power plant was planned for Mississauga—the time was basically September last year. The circumstances in the area had changed. Residential development had since come to the area, and the local officials and local residents and also both political parties all made the statement saying, "We are going to cancel this or relocate this power plant."

I'm just going to read a couple of quotes from the leader of the Conservative Party that were made just a few days before the election last year. The honourable Tim Hudak actually said on September 25, 2011, to the Globe and Mail, "We've opposed these projects in Oakville and Mississauga." Again, in a PC press release dated September 24, 2011, Mr. Hudak says, "A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant." And again, a few days before the election, on October 5, 2011, in an interview with CBC News, Mr. Hudak says, "A PC government would go to willing communities like Nanticoke and Lambton, which already have transmission lines and a workforce at power production facilities."

So when the leaders of the opposition parties and the opposition parties came out and all agreed, all made the promise that if they form the government they are going to cancel or relocate this power plant, they knew this is going to cost for them. This was quite obvious.

What we did was, basically we listened to the public, we listened to the parties as well, and we relocated this 300-megawatt natural gas power plant to the township of St. Clair. The reason we moved this power plant to St. Clair, the old Lambton site, was that, first of all, the Lambton site was host to power production for the past 35 years, and there are existing gas lines and also transmission infrastructure in place in the Lambton area. There are local expert people for power production to work in power generating stations there. Also, there are supports from the grid. It will also help us to get rid of

coal power production in the province of Ontario, as we promised. By the year 2014, we are going to get rid of power production using coal.

We have heard from the local community that the site should continue to remain a centre for electricity generation in the province of Ontario. The Sarnia-Lambton area has a long history of producing energy for the people of Ontario and hosting the electrical generating industry in this province. The construction of this plant in Sarnia at the Lambton site is going to create approximately 200 jobs.

As we all know, the minister indicated that this relocation is costing us about \$190 million, and that is the cost of relocation of this plant. Now, this cost includes a settlement agreement with EIG, which is the financier for the Greenfield South project on behalf of Greenfield Power, the OPA and the province. It also includes all payments made by the OPA, including construction costs, design costs, permitting costs, etc., for the Mississauga site.

Natural gas is a clean source of energy. I'm just going to quote a couple of statistics here, Madam Speaker. When it comes to carbon dioxide emissions, gas power plants produce or emit half of the coal power plants. If it is nitrogen oxide, their emissions are one third. When it comes to sulphur dioxide or sulphur oxide, their emission are 1%. So it is a much cleaner source of energy, and there are abundant sources of gas available for us, so—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

1820

POWER PLANTS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Huron–Bruce has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Energy concerning the cost of cancelling the Oakville gas plant. You have five minutes in which to make your comments.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: We're standing here tonight for one simple reason, and that is, clear and simple, the Liberal mismanagement of this entire file. We're here because the Liberal government is throwing money away left and right on band-aid solutions to their big, politically driven problems. Like I said this morning, instead of using fact-based science to determine policies, the McGuinty Liberals are looking for political science answers. In other words, they're going to take a look at and focus in on what is going to garner the most votes for them, not what makes the most economical sense. It's shameful.

Waste, mismanagement and doing whatever is necessary, no matter how costly it is, to save a seat, a Liberal seat, has been the name of this Liberal game. This government has put the needs of Ontario families behind political gains and opportunism. This is wrong, and it has to stop.

I asked today a simple question: When will this minister reveal the true cost of the cancellation of the

Oakville power plant? Minister, this isn't Dancing With the Stars, and we have seen so much dancing around this question. It just has to be stopped, and we ask you to do the honourable thing. If you had answered the first time, we wouldn't have had to be here debating what we already know: that this government and this ministry really have no business needlessly spending taxpayer dollars on a single kilowatt of energy that would never get produced. This is out of control: a lawsuit here, a payoff there, contingency money for emergencies only spent on failed policy on the fly.

What are you going to tell taxpayers of Ontario if a real emergency happens? What about the drought-plagued farmers across Ontario whose crops are wilting in the ground? What if we need those contingency funds for real emergencies as opposed to paying off the big companies just not to sue your government? Guess what? I'm afraid to say that when we really are going to need those contingency funds, they're not going to be there because you've squandered them away on failed policies. People will ask and remind us to ask, "What was that money spent on again?" The answer unfortunately is going to be, "Nothing."

Now, this morning, I also brought up the pending lawsuit from Trillium Power Wind Corp., another issue that the minister did not seem to want to address. Again, this Liberal government made up policy on the fly. It cancelled offshore wind turbine programs because they said the science just wasn't there to back them up. Conveniently, these projects were slated to go in the home ridings of the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy of the day. Conveniently, they ended up scrapped. Those wind turbines did not happen in Windsor or Scarborough, respectively. Now this lawsuit stands to cost the taxpayers of Ontario \$2.25 billion. That's about \$1 billion per seat of those two Liberal ministers. What job is really and truly worth that?

But while this announcement left the voters of Scarborough and Windsor happy, the sad part of it all is, while those ministers firmly sat comfortably in their seats, there's another story to tell, and that is of rural Ontario. While the Liberals were busy cancelling the offshore wind turbine program, it left people in rural Ontario saying, "What about us? What about our needs? What about our concerns? What about our communities that are literally being ripped apart?"

I'll be honest. If I was a defeated cabinet minister from rural Ontario in the previous McGuinty government, I'd be a little insulted by the fact that the Premier did not think my seat was worth the seat-saver program like others had realized. While the offshore program bit the dust, turbines are still popping up all over rural Ontario. In fact, communities are getting landlocked as turbines surround them. So the McGuinty Liberals have leaned on science—political science, that is—to cancel the offshore program, but they won't lean on science to cancel on-shore wind programs. It just doesn't make any sense, and I don't blame rural Ontario communities for feeling anger and very slighted towards this decision.

Rural Ontario matters. In fact, all of Ontario taxpayers matter.

We need you to stand up and do the honourable thing and answer the question. Reveal the true costs of the Oakville power plant cancellation. In other words, what is the true cost of one Liberal seat in Oakville?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Madam Speaker, it's again a pleasure to rise in this House and respond to the question raised by the member from Huron-Bruce on the cancellation of the Oakville plant. As I indicated in my previous response to the member from Nipissing, the OPA currently is in negotiation with TransCanada about the cancellation of this plant. The negotiation is going on, and we have to wait until these commercially sensitive negotiations are concluded.

Once these negotiations are concluded, then, of course, those figures will be indicated and will be presented to this House and to the people of Ontario, as we did in the case of Mississauga plant. Once the Mississauga plant negotiations were finalized, the day after that, the minister was out there and talking to the media and giving information about the results of the negotiation, basically, to the media and also to the public. We have to wait until these commercially sensitive negotiations between the Ontario Power Authority and TransCanada come to a conclusion.

But, Madam Speaker, I'm going to read a few quotes from people and see what people are saying about this relocation of the power plant from Oakville to Lambton. His Worship Mayor Steve Arnold, on July 11, 2012, to the Sarnia Observer stated, "I told the minister the community would view it as a very positive thing for us all."

The Coalition of Homeowners for Intelligent Power stated on their website on October 5, 2011, "The Coalition of Homeowners for Intelligent Power, which has been fighting the plant for six years, noted that Hudak did not oppose the plant in the past..."

They added, "Mississauga South Liberal MPP Charles Sousa has stood with residents in opposition to the plant from the beginning."

Of course, the honourable Tim Hudak, the leader of the PC Party, just a few days before the election, stated to the Globe and Mail that "We've opposed these projects in Oakville and Mississauga."

Again, on September 24, just a few days before the election in 2011, in a press release, the PC Party stated, "A Tim Hudak government will cancel this plant."

Just two or three days before the election—on October 5, actually—Mr. Hudak, in an interview with CBC news, stated that "A PC government would go to willing communities like Nanticoke and Lambton, which already have transmission lines and a workforce at power production facilities."

These are the statements of the leader of the Conservative Party—and also similar statements given by the leader of the NDP that if they formed the government, they were going to cancel these power plants.

They knew, I am sure they knew—they were supposed to know that cancellation of these power plants was going to cost money. It's not going to be free.

This is what all parties wanted to do. We listened to the communities, to the people of the area, and this cancellation happened.

I'm going to quote, Madam Speaker, MPP Bob Bailey, on July 12, 2012; it's quoted in the Sarnia Observer. He states "I think it's positive news, obviously, for our area, with 200 construction jobs." MPP Bailey basically acknowledged that building this power plant in the Sarnia-Lambton area is going to help his riding. It's going to create 200 jobs. "That's positive news for our area." He is absolutely right.

The member from Simcoe-Grey, who was a former energy minister during Conservative governments in the past, stated in Hansard on October 30, 2000, "Two plants that are being proposed, one in Brampton and one in

Mississauga, will be the largest of their kind in North America: one 800-megawatt plant in Brampton and one 800-megawatt natural-gas-fired plant in Mississauga."

I can read to you a similar quote from MPP Peter Tabuns from the NDP caucus on September 26, 2011—again, a few days before the election. He stated, "We wouldn't build it." He meant those power plants. Again, the local NDP candidate confirmed in a press release that the NDP would cancel the plant.

These are the quotes we have from both parties that if they formed government, they would have cancelled these power plants.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1831.

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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
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Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
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Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
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McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Millroy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
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Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
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Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
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Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
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Bill Walker
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Cheri DiNovo, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Ernie Hardeman, Tracy MacCharles
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

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Wednesday 29 August 2012

Mercredi 29 août 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 August 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 août 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let us pray.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, in the opinion of this House, full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment the government can make in the social and economic future of our children and, on this basis, the House supports the government's commitment to ensure that 250,000 Ontario four- and five-year-olds will be enrolled in North America's first full-day kindergarten program by September 2014.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Milloy has moved government motion 45. Mr. Milloy.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm only going to speak just for a minute or two, and I'd like to share my time with the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

I think all of us recognize the important link between education and the economy, and the fact that we need to start an education as early as possible. I've told the story that when I was Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and meeting with some of the financial experts and experts on the economy in talking about where we should invest in terms of post-secondary education, I said, "If you had that proverbial extra dollar, where should it be invested?" The consensus around the table with some of these lead thinkers was not post-secondary education; it was four- and five-year-olds. We have to start at the beginning, Mr. Speaker. That's what full-day kindergarten is about.

I have visited many, many schools within my riding where full-day kindergarten is offered and have been impressed with the huge progress that has been made in those students who have gone through it, compared to those who didn't have that benefit. So as I say, I think this motion speaks for itself.

As I said, with that, I will turn it over to my colleague the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Once upon a time, there was a Great Depression, followed by a great world war. After the war was over, millions of soldiers returned to marry millions of women, build millions of families, spawn the

baby boom generation and begin an era of prosperity. Most of these baby boomers—people like me, people like many of you, if you are aged 45 or older—did not attend full-day kindergarten, and the reason is not hard to figure out: It wasn't available.

Not knowing that full-day kindergarten would benefit us, none of our generation really missed it. In fact, today it is easy for many our age, for whom full-day kindergarten was never an option, to airily dismiss it as fluff or free babysitting, and that would be a tragedy. It would be a tragedy for the generation of kids who would not gain the benefits of socializing with other kids at an early age or learning before their formal schooling begins. It would be a tragedy for employers who will need the kind of skilled people that research says benefit from an early start that full-day kindergarten brings.

Ontarians know that a strong education system has the power to open doors, to change lives and to empower people to achieve their goals; our government knows that as well. For many of us, bringing that hope to educators, to families and to kids represents a big part of the reason that many of us got into government in the first place.

More significantly, other nations know that too. That's why in China, in India, throughout Asia, in Europe and in Latin America, they grasp the benefit that full-day learning brings to their children.

If you're a nation that competes with Ontario on the world stage, you only hope that the retrograde, regressive, anti-education attitude that permeates the entire North American Conservative movement takes hold so that your children can outperform Ontario children. Only among North American Conservatives is education seen as an expense to be minimized rather than an investment whose value should be maximized. So if Conservatives in Ontario don't like full-day kindergarten, you know that there must be something good about it.

In China, they start their youngsters off by teaching them something that the Chinese feel will give them an advantage over us in North America: They teach their best kids how to speak English. Mandarin is the world's leading first language; Spanish is second; English is third; French is 18th. In China, at any given time, there are more kids learning English than there are people in England. In India, the official language is not Hindi—which, by the way, is fourth; it is English. Arabic is fifth; Portuguese is sixth.

The rest of the world is teaching their kids as early as possible to be able to relate to us on our terms. It seems only sensible that we should similarly enrich our own kids. Education is what it takes to succeed in the 21st

century, where wealth will be created in the heads of skilled people. Only North American Conservatives don't get that.

Since 2003, Ontario has worked hard to improve our education system and to give every student the opportunity to succeed and to develop the skills necessary for future success. It's our shared responsibility to make sure we're giving our students the skills and the experience that they need to succeed, and that lifelong advantage begins for children in their preschool years. Only the Conservatives steadfastly refuse to see that. How do we know? When the Progressive Conservatives were last in power in Ontario, they closed schools and fired teachers. They lost some 26 million teaching days to strikes—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

0910

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm finding that the constant bombardment of less-than-historical inaccuracies is starting to drain the members of the opposition and our patience for such fiction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm not quite sure that it's a point of order. However, I do recall yesterday that there was a little bit of a bombardment going the other way, so we'll give the member some flexibility. But try to stick to the script, please.

Mr. Michael Prue: That is the script.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. I was up until late last night working on this script, and I'm kind of proud of it.

Let's see. When the Conservatives were last in power, only 54% of students were meeting the provincial standard when they left office. Worse, one in three students didn't finish secondary school. The Conservatives, it seems, are in love with mediocrity and second-place thinking. As Liberals, we are not. We want Ontario kids to be the best, and today they are the best. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rates Ontario students as the best in the English-speaking world and in the top five worldwide. During the last nine years, Ontario Liberals have worked hard to rebuild public trust in Ontario's education system, a system that was left in disarray after years of neglect under Conservative governments.

The results achieved by working with teachers and school boards are something to be proud of. Ontario has supported student achievement by keeping class sizes small so that students can continue to get the attention they need to succeed. Ninety-one per cent of primary classes have 20 or fewer students, compared to 31% in 2003. All primary classes have 23 or fewer students, compared to 64% in 2003. More students are graduating high school than ever before, with 82% of students graduating in 2010-11. That's a jump of 14 percentage points, from 68% who graduated during the last year of the last Conservative government. Today, 93,000 more students have graduated than would have completed secondary school had the rate remained at the 2003-04 level.

That's roughly equivalent to giving the entire population of the city of Brantford a world-class, supercharged, first-rate education—

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, standing order 23 requires that the person speak to the order at hand. The motion does not speak about graduation rates from high school or anything else; it speaks about full-day kindergarten. I would ask, Speaker, that you compel the member to either speak to the motion or spare us and take a seat.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I hear the point of order. I'm not sure it's a point of order. The member is giving a comparative analysis of the school system; I'm not quite sure I can call him out of order for that. But I would suggest that he not continue to go after the opposition when it doesn't relate to the motion we're talking about. I'll be watching very carefully. Please don't stick to the script in that case, okay? Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker.

The steady, year-over-year increase in the high school graduation rate is thanks to the province's student success strategy and the hard work of students, teachers, principals and support staff. Ontario students in all grades are getting the knowledge they need to succeed and the skills to compete in our ever-changing economy. Sixty-nine per cent of students in grades 3 and 6 are meeting or exceeding the provincial standards, and this is up 15 percentage points from 54% nine years ago. Ontario students are recognized as being in the top 10 in the world for reading, according to the results from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessments. Ontario is recognized as one of the few jurisdictions in the world where 92% of students are performing above international standards, regardless of their socio-economic background or their first language. All of this didn't happen by accident, nor did it happen overnight. This province and this government had to make some challenging choices, not just in these tough economic times but also in the past eight years, around our priorities and particularly Ontario's priorities in early learning.

From the beginning, a strong education has been an essential piece of our government's plan to build a stronger Ontario. This government set a goal to make Ontario's education system the best in the world, and we have met that goal. You don't have to look any further than full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation, as evidence of that.

Our government recognized that the historic separation between formal education and early childhood learning needed to be transformed to support a more natural mode of learning. Increased integration means a more seamless transition for children, which helps create the conditions necessary for them to be successful both in school and in life. That's why in 2007 Premier McGuinty

appointed Dr. Charles Pascal to be his special adviser on early learning. In June 2009, Dr. Pascal delivered his report, which is called, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. The report contained 20 recommendations on how to introduce full-day learning to Ontario students and to create seamless, integrated services for children and young families, including a recommendation to bring full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds to Ontario.

Our government agreed with Dr. Pascal's direction and chose to introduce full-day kindergarten as an essential step to help our youngest children get a better education. Full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds is one of the most important investments that Ontario has ever made. We believe it's an important one. It's about setting our kids on the road to success and building a stronger knowledge-based economy in the province of Ontario.

So let's come back to Ontario Conservatives, once led by an education minister. Today, their ever-changing position on full-day kindergarten mirrors their discord and conflict on so many other important issues. If it doesn't square with the US-based, Tea Party brand of retro nostalgia, they don't see its value—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the member is drifting a little bit. A Tea Party comparison is a little bit out of line, so I would suggest you withdraw that one.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Withdrawn.

Ontario Liberals know that full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment that we can make in the social and economic future of our children. We stand by our commitment to ensure that 250,000 Ontario four- and five-year-olds will be enrolled in North America's first full-day kindergarten by September 2014.

The program establishes a strong foundation for learning in the early years in a safe and caring play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of all children. Giving Ontario four- and five-year-olds a full day of learning helps improve their success in school, including their skills in reading, writing and math, and it provides a smoother transition to grade 1. Our province's approach to kindergarten helps children develop the skills they need to set them on track to a good foundation for success in school and in life.

Ontario is phasing full-day kindergarten into our education system gradually, with about 50,000 four- and five-year-olds now benefiting from full-day kindergarten at nearly 800 schools across the province this year. By next fall, nearly half of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds will be in full-day kindergarten at approximately 1,700 schools, and by 2014, full-day kindergarten will be available for all Ontario's kindergarten-eligible students. This gradual implementation has allowed municipalities, child care operators and communities to adjust to the changes this initiative brings.

0920

In addition to the funding received through the grants for student needs, the Ministry of Education will provide up to \$675 million in funding to school boards to support year three, reaching about 122,000 students. In total, this commitment is an allocation of just under \$1.4 billion in capital funding to support the implementation of full-day kindergarten. As of this September, approximately 120,000 children in nearly 1,700 schools across the province will benefit from this new enriched, integrated full day of learning.

Depending on demand, some schools with full-day kindergarten programs have offered before- and after-school programs, run by the school boards, for on-site third-party child care providers. This flexibility allows boards to continue building on their strong relationships with local child care providers while offering integrated programs in one physical location that best serves the needs of students, families and communities. Having access to before- and after-school programming with teachers, as well as early childhood educators, has provided our children with opportunities to better prepare them for the more advanced learning that takes place in grade 1 and beyond.

These programs have given children a seamless day in one location, with continuous staffing, familiar faces and friends, and it's a place where they feel safe and encouraged to learn and to play and to explore. Full-day kindergarten has also made life easier for Ontario's families. Too many parents have to juggle their children's schedules between school and child care while worrying about work and other responsibilities.

In addition to being more convenient for families, the long-term economic advantage of full-day learning will give Ontario a competitive edge in this global society. Parents are saving up to \$6,500 per child in child care costs while their kids benefit from all-day learning. This initiative has also helped create more jobs for Ontarians and helped more Ontarians be able to accept jobs. At full implementation, there will be approximately 3,800 additional teaching positions and as many as 20,000 early childhood educator positions staffed to support full-day kindergarten.

Studies have shown that the return on public investment for young children is at least 7 to 1. A recent study conducted by Janette Pelletier, director of the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, highlighted the benefits of full-day kindergarten for children, for their parents and for full-day kindergarten staff. The study, based on preliminary year one findings in Peel region, where our local school boards are innovative and world-class, compared the experiences of almost 200 students enrolled in the full-day kindergarten program with those enrolled in regular half-day kindergarten classes.

Key findings found that full-day kindergarten students had greater early numeracy, language and reading and writing skills than those in regular kindergarten classes.

The study also looked into the experiences of full-day kindergarten parents and how they felt the program benefited their children. Full-day kindergarten parents found that their children seemed more ready for social, academic and physical activities. They also reported a reduction in stress by having their children's school and child care programs integrated at one physical location. The study also reported that both teachers and early childhood educators felt that full-day kindergarten greatly benefited Ontario's students, and they felt that their school community strongly supported them.

We have clearly seen the benefits of full-day kindergarten, and we will continue to monitor the program so that we can ensure that it continues to benefit Ontario's students and their families.

Ontario is viewed across the globe as the leader in education excellence, and we must uphold that reputation. That's why the implementation of full-day kindergarten in Ontario has been so important. Through initiatives such as full-day kindergarten, we will continue to build the best-educated workforce in the world.

Ontarians are proud of the choices our province has made: to protect the gains that we've made in education and to protect the classroom experience for our students. We have chosen smaller class sizes and protecting 20,000 teaching and support staff jobs, and we have chosen to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten. In challenging economic times, this government has proven its commitment to putting students first.

This week, the Minister of Education introduced the Putting Students First Act. In July, the government signed an agreement with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. The agreement represents a road map that balances the need for Ontario to reach its fiscal targets while protecting our investments in full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and in a superior classroom experience. It took an investment of more than 300 hours of discussions, and it's reflected in the proposed Putting Students First Act. It's a fair and balanced approach that will benefit Ontario's youngest teachers and will help preserve 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

The proposed legislation would take effect on September 1 but provide, until December 31, 2012, for school boards, teachers and support staff to engage in local bargaining. This would allow boards and unions to reach local agreements while also including the parameters set out in the legislation.

As the start of the school year approaches, we have an obligation to assure Ontario parents that schools will start in September and continue uninterrupted by labour disputes. I ask my colleagues from all parties to keep Ontario students in mind and to support this government motion and also support the Putting Students First Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I look forward to addressing the assembly for the next hour on this motion.

You have to question the motive, first and foremost, of the government bringing this motion forward today, after we've been brought back early, to put kids in their classrooms. For example, we could actually be debating that bill today, the Putting Students First Act, Bill 115. The government chose not to do that.

I might say, to borrow a line from the leader of the third party, that Bill 115 and this motion is more about seats in the Legislature than it is about putting kids in the classroom.

I think, for anybody that watches this Legislature—and I don't know why, after nine years of watching this Liberal government, anybody still would—but watching this assembly, one would suggest that this really is about trying to wedge a political party, namely our party, in a by-election that's happening in Kitchener–Waterloo which they're going to lose. The question is really: Why are we entertaining a motion on a bill that has been passed, on a program that has been implemented and on an issue that has been closed in this assembly? Why else would we be dealing with this motion if it weren't for more nefarious reasons?

If the Liberals want to continue to talk about issues that we have felt were long past resolved, then I think it's really important that we set the stage by talking a little about the fiscal situation in Ontario. We have to talk about how we fund our publicly funded education system. We have to talk about whether or not it is going to be sustainable in the long run.

Speaker, you and I have been in this chamber together for many years now—well, maybe not that many, but long enough—

Interjection: Two.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Two terms. We may not always agree on philosophy or ideology or even issues or matters of the day. However, from time to time, you must agree with me, Speaker, that their motives are not always pure. They like to cover the fact that they have run the strongest economy in Confederation into the ground. The repercussions of that action and that continued action over nine long years are whether or not we're going to be able to continue to afford the public institutions we all cherish.

0930

We know, for example, that under the Liberal government's watch they lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Those manufacturing jobs would pay income taxes to the province of Ontario. They would buy from local stores in Ontario, and those tax dollars go directly into funding our cherished institutions. It's quite simple, actually. It would be, as one of their heroines, Belinda Stronach, the great Liberal, would have said, baking a bigger economic pie. The reality, as you know full well, is that when we have more tax dollars contributing to our economy, not by raising taxes but by making sure more people are paying into the system, we're able to sustain those core values.

Let me tell you something, Speaker: This is a government that is running record deficits, larger than every other single province combined, and they have the largest

debt in the nation outside of the federal government, larger than every other province combined. The reality, as I would like to point out to the minister of Ornge—you remember that Ornge helicopter scandal? She should probably be focused on that right now. But the point I am trying to make, and it's one that has been made by their own finance minister but I think they like to cover their ears, is that this debt and deficit require us to not only pay it back, but at high interest rates.

Now, you will be interested to know, Speaker, that the first, largest priority of spending in our province is in the Ministry of Health, with the minister of Ornge over there. The second is in the Ministry of Education. The third-largest spending priority of this Liberal government, according to Dwight Duncan, the finance minister, is servicing the debt and the deficits. That is larger than our training, colleges and universities ministry; it is larger than municipal affairs—all of those put together, every other ministry, outside of health care and education. Now, I contend, and I've said it many times in this chamber, that every single dollar we spend on servicing the debt and the deficit that they continue to grow is one less dollar for kids in classrooms.

That takes me to a very important report that the Liberals had commissioned last year, due out right after the election, because these guys—oh, my goodness, Speaker, they are some crafty. They time everything. For example, they like to—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I'm just suggesting perhaps that the same standard be applied here, pursuant to section 23(b) of the standing orders: that the nature of the discussion be focused on the debate at hand, which is full-day kindergarten, if I recall, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member for her point of order, but it will be up to me to determine whether she is drifting or not. If I think she is, I'll let her know. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. This directly relates to full-day kindergarten. Let me explain to the new member. I know she has been here less than a year, but this is how it works in this chamber. They spend the money and then there's less for it in priorities. You know, when you're spending \$190 million on a power plant, when you shred \$100 million at Ornge, or a billion bucks there, they don't care, but it has implications. So before this member was elected, her genius government decided they were going to commission a hand-picked economic adviser, the guy who brought in the HST, that \$3-billion greedy HST tax grab. They asked Don Drummond to come back and write a report on the state of Ontario's finances.

I'm going to read a couple of quotes just so the member understands, because something actually does pay for public services like public education; it's called tax dollars, and we have a budget in Ontario. This is completely

in line because it explains how we pay for one of the largest big-ticket items in this government.

This is what—and maybe she didn't get a chance to read Don Drummond's report, but on the executive summary, page 3, I'll read this to her: "Government debt"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the member has dialogue through the Chair and not directly at the member.

And about her length of stay here, I don't really think that applies to what we're talking about in this motion, so I would suggest you negate that from your discussion.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker.

I just would like to point out, however—before I finish my quote on a report that was commissioned before the last election when certain members weren't already elected—that in relation to the decision on full-day kindergarten, that also occurred before many members arrived here after the 2011 election. Some members may need to be educated on the impact of the debt and deficit on public sector spending, so I will explain.

"Government debt can rise quickly if not headed off early.... The recent decision by Moody's Investors Service to revise its outlook on" government "bonds from stable to negative is a danger sign." Those aren't my words; those are their hand-picked economic adviser's words. Don Drummond said this about his own party.

He also said, "With the global recession hitting Ontario particularly hard, Ontario's recent deficit ... is poor; relative to GDP, it ran the biggest provincial deficits in the country for three consecutive years beginning in 2008-09; the current 2011-12 fiscal year is likely to add a fourth." Again, those aren't my words; those are their hand-picked economic adviser's words—Don Drummond.

Don Drummond, of course, Speaker, as you know, wrote an entire report with recommendations, some of which I believe have been wholly and fully embraced by this Liberal regime that has been in power for nine years and that has put us into this poor fiscal state.

I've told you the economic background of the province. I've now told you the situation we are in relative to how we are paying off our debt and our deficit. I'm now bringing you to the point, Mr. Speaker, of what their own hand-picked economic adviser, Don Drummond, said to them. Of course, Don Drummond is the individual who convinced the Premier of Ontario and the Liberal finance minister, Dwight Duncan, to implement the HST after they promised no new taxes.

This is what he says in his report—and I'm going to read the entire thing into the record, because I think that some Liberals may have forgotten what Don Drummond's direct advice to their Premier was. This is chapter 6, "Elementary and Secondary Education," page 213. Now, it is important that I stress and I emphasize one more time that these are not the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus's words, not Tim Hudak's words—this is the Liberal Party of Ontario's own hand-picked economic adviser's words. That would be Don Drummond.

He says, "In recent years, the government has devoted significant attention and resources to early learning. In 2009, the government committed to implementing full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds with an investment of \$200 million in 2010-11 and \$300 million in 2011-12. Dr. Charles Pascal was appointed as the Premier's special adviser on early learning, and was asked to provide recommendations for implementing a full-day early learning program.

"Dr. Pascal's 2009 report, 'With Our Best Future in Mind,' recommended the development and implementation of a coherent approach to early childhood development and education, including FDK for four- and five-year-olds. Dr. Pascal also recommended before- and after-school programming for kindergarten students, funded through parent fees." That's an important distinction.

"In September 2010, FDK was launched in nearly 600 schools across Ontario. The rollout has continued in 2011 with an additional 200 schools, and about 900 new school sites have been announced for the 2012-13 school year. A framework for the extended-day component of the program has also been set; school boards offer the program either independently or through on-site third-party partners, in areas where there is enough demand.

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"The commission"—this would be the commission hand-picked by the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty—"appreciates the research and analysis that was performed by Dr. Pascal. There is substantial evidence that investments in early childhood education produce significant socio-economic benefits in the long term. The Pascal report offers a plan that reduces gaps in child development policy, supports student achievement, and promotes better long-term economic, health and social outcomes.

"However, consideration must also be given to the demands placed on the education system by the program, and the resources required to meet these demands. Costs associated with new staff, classroom supplies, transportation, other school operations, capital and stabilization for the child care sector will result in a mature program expense of over \$1.5 billion...."

Now, I will just stop for a moment to editorialize. I ask my colleagues in the third party and in the opposition and even in the government—\$1.5 billion is a lot of money—can you imagine if there was no such thing as the cancelled Mississauga power plant, \$190 million; if there was no such thing as the big scandal at eHealth, where we could have saved a billion dollars; and can you imagine if there was no scandal and they actually got it right at Ornge, our air ambulance service here in Ontario, and we didn't waste a billion dollars? Do you know what that \$3 billion could have brought Ontario students? I ask the government that question.

I will move forward on this, going back to the Drummond report, on the affordability of full-day kindergarten. "Given the current fiscal climate," he says, "the commission"—and I remind them, it is their own hand-

picked government commission—"is concerned that the timing is not appropriate for a new program with a cost of this magnitude. The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget and the 2011 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review in November." That's why I think some members who may not have been elected before the 2011 election may need to review the Drummond report in its entirety to understand the fiscal mess the Liberal government got us into before that period.

I'll go back: "The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget...." He goes on, "But as we have discussed elsewhere, not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall deficit" reduction.

I'm going to read that one more time. You know, when I'm finished here, I think I may send this over to my honourable colleague, who is a little confused over the ability to fund certain programs here in Ontario.

Let me read this again: "But as we have discussed elsewhere, not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall deficit objective."

The commission—the hand-picked Liberal government Don Drummond commission—considered recommending the suspension of further implementation of the FDK program. What this is saying is that the Liberals' own hand-picked economic adviser who brought us the \$3-billion greedy HST cash grab is now telling his own government from his own party, his own pals, his own buddies, that they should suspend further implementation of the FDK program.

I know that this government brought this motion in today to divert attention from the \$190-million cancellation of the Mississauga gas plant. I know they don't want to talk about the Ornge fiasco—those hearings; the fact that they haven't been able to move forward on bringing any accountability to light there. So they brought this motion here in order to try to wedge us and get us off our game. But I'm just going to continue to read from Don Drummond's report, because Don Drummond was a member of the Liberal Party and is their hand-picked economic adviser. He says:

"The commission considered recommending the suspension of further implementation of the FDK program, with a progressive redistribution over time of the funded sites to communities with the lowest socio-economic status within each board. However, such an approach would create inequalities, and would pose additional challenges for families, schools, boards and government."

If that's not a big acknowledgement by their own hand-picked economic adviser that they bungled this file, I don't know what is. But again, don't take my word for it; take the commission's word for it. Each member was presented with a copy of the commission. This is a product of the government of Ontario; it is from the Queen's Printer for Ontario. This is a document prepared for members of the assembly. Each member of the assembly,

including the Liberal government, should have the opportunity to do some free thinking on their own and should be allowed to read all of this document, not just the executive summary, and not be told what to think.

Let's go to the recommendations on page 214. I remind you: This is from the government's own economic adviser. This is not from the PC Party's policy adviser. These are not words from an elected official on the PC side. This is from the government. Recommendation 6-11:

"Given the difficulties with such an approach, and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the commission recommends the cancellation of the full-day kindergarten (FDK) program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this government strategy.

"The Ministry of Education should carefully develop phase-out provisions so that a child who had a full day in junior kindergarten would not move to a half day in senior kindergarten, and so that purpose-built spaces are appropriately utilized for child care."

I'm not sure that this government quite understands the gravity of the recommendation their own adviser is making to them. They either are not aware that he made this recommendation or they're ignoring his recommendation, or there's another option: Perhaps they're going to do it and they have a hidden agenda over there.

This is a road map by their own handpicked economic adviser. He recommends:

"Given the difficulties with such an approach and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the commission recommends the cancellation of the full-day kindergarten ... program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this government strategy."

That is what their own government has to say. Their government produced a report recommending the cancellation of full-day kindergarten.

That's not the only recommendation. There is another recommendation by Don Drummond on full-day kindergarten, given the fiscal restraints the province has faced since this government has taken office. I need not remind you that over 300,000 good, well-paying manufacturing jobs have gone the way of the dodo bird because this government has not been able to manage the economy, manage energy prices or keep its government spending under control. So what has happened? Our debt and our deficit have dramatically increased. In addition, we're starting to see our interest rate go beyond our ability to pay here in Ontario. At the same time, they continue to spend without any regard for the consequences of what this will mean for public education.

Let's get back to Don Drummond's next recommendation. "If the government decides to continue the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program, then the commission recommends delaying full implementation from 2014-15 to 2017-18 and reducing program costs by adopting a more affordable staffing model, involving one teacher for about 20 students, rather than a teacher and an

early childhood educator for 26 students, to help moderate salary expenditures for the program by about \$200 million." Of course, that is right here in the Don Drummond report. "The government should not confirm full implementation of the program without assurances from school boards, teacher federations and support staff unions that negotiated annual wage increases by 2017-18 will not be higher than the current trends in the broader public sector, and that the class size increases and reductions in non-teaching staff contemplated by the commission by 2017-18 will be achieved."

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He then gives them a second way, if you will, Speaker, another option in order to balance the books so that public education and programs like full-day kindergarten could be sustainable in the long term, but only once—in Don Drummond's opinion—they get their fiscal house in order. I must admit I'm quite surprised that their own hand-picked economic adviser would turn on them this way. But, again, he says that if they continue to implement the full-day kindergarten program, then the commission recommends delaying full implementation.

I would just like to finish on page 214: "This approach would also help ease the oversupply of teachers in the labour market and reduce costs associated with correcting the current undersupply of ECEs."

So, Speaker, there you have it. There has been criticism of their program. They like to say that it only comes from one side of the assembly. I'd like to point out that it comes from within their own ranks. I'd like to point out that there are people out there who are concerned by the size, the scope, that this government has created in our public service, and that there are people in Ontario who are concerned about our ability to pay.

In fact, Don Drummond, in what I find is a prophetic statement, talks about expenditures, and he talks about negotiated annual wage increases. This report was released, I believe, in January, or February, perhaps; it's on the front page here. It was early 2012, in any event, Speaker. And here we are at an emergency recalling of the Legislative Assembly, given another teachers' bill that I referenced earlier on, the Putting Students First Act, Bill 115. We're here to debate that because this government, for the first time in nine years, understood what Tim Hudak and what the PC caucus have been saying for a long time: You can't keep spending without problems on the other end. Like Old Mother Hubbard, she has nothing left in her cupboard, and the reality is, we are in a really rough and difficult time here in Ontario.

So we're here debating Bill 115. The Liberals decide to put this in as a distraction, because I'm sure that their plan hasn't gone exactly the way they wanted it to. We recognized that they needed some help, that we needed to bail them out, we needed to make sure that they could get the kids in the classrooms come September, because here's the thing: We can't afford 5.5% increases in the government of Ontario anymore. We're facing a \$30-billion deficit. Don't take my word for it; take Don Drummond's. Their own economic adviser, their own

numbers, say we're facing a \$30-billion deficit. We cannot continue to spend like that without seeing absolutely terrible repercussions on front-line education.

So we're here to deal with this legislated wage freeze. We believe, like Don Drummond says, that we have to deal with something throughout the entire broader public sector, and we have to ensure that we have a legislated wage freeze for the next two years. In the words of Tim Hudak, we believe that Bill 115 is half a loaf, but we've got to get that spending under control or we're not going to be able to afford core, basic public services. I'm talking about walking into a hospital and I'm talking about enrolling your child in school, because this government is on a course that will dramatically alter the course of our future in Ontario if they are not more responsible with how they pay our bills, how they pay our staff and how they invest in the future of the next generation.

I look at the young pages here, and I think to myself that they are going to get out of university with at least an \$11,000 debt that they are going to be responsible for paying, as a result of taxes, to this government so we can continue to keep the lights on in Ontario. That is absolutely the case. Don Drummond acknowledges it. Their own hand-picked adviser had a meeting with them. I would say that this Don Drummond report is an intervention—it could probably be on A&E's *Intervention*—and they chose not to listen. They're spendaholics.

Then, when they can't spend the money fast enough, they contract it out through their government boards, agencies and commissions and they tell their buddies, "Come on over. We'll get you an appointment. We'll ask you to spend a little bit of money." I'm thinking of Chris Mazza here, Speaker. I'm thinking of Courtyard, over at the eHealth scandal. I'm thinking about all these names that have cropped up over the last few years.

There are a lot of stories to tell, but a lot more public money has been wasted. I envisage that Dwight Duncan must have this massive shredder right beside his desk, and when he gets bored, he takes \$100 bills—no, wait \$1,000 bills—and he just shreds them. I imagine that's what he does, because how else can you explain the cancellation of a power plant by a campaign worker, not the minister, costing taxpayers \$190 million? That money could have gone into full-day kindergarten—

Interjections.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order: The member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, this has gone really over the top; not only is the member violating standing order 23 by imputing motive, but the member has also been significantly off the topic for some time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Your point of order is taken into consideration. The member was getting very close to being reprimanded, so I would suggest that she stick to the motion. All these other sidelines can be overlooked for a certain amount of time, but I think you're going back to the trough a few times.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker.

Let me just say this—and I appreciate the intervention, because it reminds me that I do have an amendment to the government notice of motion number 45. This is really important, because it speaks to the concerns that we have in the official opposition of our ability to pay for government programs, including full-day kindergarten, while they're wasting money at scandals like that \$190-million power plant in Mississauga, close to his riding, like the Ornge scandal and like at eHealth and other places.

Speaker, I move that all the words following "on this basis" be deleted and the following be added: "to ensure the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, the House requires the government to ask the Auditor General to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure that the Liberal government's nine years of overspending do not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health care and classroom education."

Speaker, you'll recognize that this is very consistent with my speech, my concerns and the issues that our—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. MacLeod has moved an amendment to government motion number 45. I'll re-read the amendment.

"I move that all the words following 'on this basis' be deleted and the following be added: 'to ensure the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, the House requires the government to ask the Auditor General to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure that the Liberal government's nine years of overspending do not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health care and classroom education.'"

Debate on the amendment to the motion, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I do appreciate you and the member from Mississauga—Streetsville reminding me of that critical amendment that I needed to put forward, because it is really important, now that I'm able to debate my amendment, to talk about the fiscal situation in Ontario, the devastating consequences as a result of their nine years of mismanagement and overspending, and their tax and increasing waste, because, as you know, the Don Drummond report wasn't even—he was told, "You're not allowed to bring in a tax increase." That's why he was talking about some of these interesting cuts, but Dalton McGuinty then—I must ask, and the NDP would know this: What was he paid a day? You were asking questions about this—

Mr. Michael Prue: Fifteen hundred dollars a day.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, \$1,500 a day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would remind the member that she's not going to talk to people directly. You go through the Chair, and you do turn around quite a bit. I would suggest you look this way. Thank you.

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I know they wanted to watch me.

My colleagues in the third party reminded me that the Liberal government paid Don Drummond \$1,500 a day to make his recommendations on full-day kindergarten. They must value it, or they don't value money.

Again, just so we're all very clear, I would like to draw the attention of my colleagues opposite the motion that we put forward: "That, in the opinion of this House, full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment the government can make in the social and economic future of our children and, on this basis, to ensure the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, the House requires the government to ask the Auditor General to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure that the Liberal government's nine years of overspending does not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health and classroom care."

Now, let's go back to page 213 of Don Drummond's report, where he talks about offsets. He talks about offsets as it pertains to full-day kindergarten.

All we're doing today, Speaker, is asking them to follow the report they paid \$1,500 a day to table. It was an expensive report with information from their own hand-picked economic adviser on the implementation of full-day kindergarten, which they have a motion on before the House today. Let's go back to page 213, where Don Drummond—and I quote him one more time: "Given the current fiscal climate, the commission is concerned that the timing is not appropriate for a new program with a cost of this magnitude. The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget and the 2011 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review in November. But as we have discussed elsewhere"—and Speaker, again, these are not the words of the Ontario PC Party; these are the words of the Liberals' own economic adviser, Don Drummond—"not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall deficit objective."

Speaker, if they won't take their own advice, we will put it to them in the form of this amendment and talk about the offsets and talk about the fiscal accountability and talk about the reality of life in Ontario. They have for nine years spent us into debt and deficit and have tripled Ontario's debt in a short decade. There are consequences to that type of spending. There are consequences to our public education system as a result of their mismanagement. That is why this masterpiece of a report that their own economic adviser gave to this assembly should be considered in this debate that the members opposite refuse to acknowledge.

They refuse to acknowledge the reality that we are facing in Ontario. If we are not at a crisis at this point, we sure will be soon. The tipping point will continue. We will continue to arrive at that tipping point if this government does not get its fiscal house in order. When they

talk about putting students first, I ask them: Don't you think giving them a solid financial house in Ontario is going to be just as important to ensure that they are not working for the rest of their lives paying off their debt and their deficit?

I ask them this question because I have a high-growth community, Nepean-Carleton. In fact, yesterday the riding was split in two by the federal boundaries commission. Growth is so high, we need new schools all the time, because there are basically people moving in—our former mayor is here. He understands the growth constraints that we have. We need to open new schools because there are so many kids coming into the community, being born in the community, my daughter is one of them. There are just so many—we call Barrhaven "Babyhaven" because we're all mothers and fathers and we all have two cars, or a car and a dog and a cat. The reality is, we've got kids in portables in brand new schools taking up the entire backyard playground of the school—a brand new school—because we can't keep up with the growth and this government can't keep up with funding requirements to the school boards.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So they play politics; they play politics.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's so much easier for them to play politics. You know what we call it? I'm from Ottawa, as you know, Speaker. My husband works on Parliament Hill; I used to work on Parliament Hill, too. We used to have a term for what these guys are playing. It's "smallitics." Instead of dealing with the big issues of the day, instead of actually affirming that they're on the wrong path and they can't continue to afford programs, the reality is, they're playing smallitics, little games.

They have already passed full-day kindergarten; it's already in their budget. I'm going to be honest with you, Speaker. It's not too hard to find, if they want to find it. Don Drummond even said they paid for it here—in 2014-15 it's going to be paid for—and they put it in their 2011 budget and their 2011 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review. So what they want to do is play politics.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Smallitics.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They want to play smallitics. They want to have their cake and eat it too, because they're in a by-election. They think they're going to win a majority next week. Well, I can tell you something: If you want to talk about education and putting students first, there were 5,000 teachers out front yesterday who told them, "No way, José. We're not supporting you anymore." They may not be supportive of our wage restraint message either, but I can tell you something: The teachers did not give me three back-to-back-to-back victories; the people of Nepean-Carleton gave me three back-to-back-to-back majority victories, the largest vote total in the province of Ontario. And the only person who had a higher percentage was my buddy John Yakabuski from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would remind the member that we all appreciate self-promotion, but I'm not quite sure that has anything to do with what

we're talking about. Thank you for those stats, and I congratulate you on your consecutive victories, but please stick to the issue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. But it is important, because it points to the fact that I wasn't beholden to special interest groups or unions to win an election, so I have clarity when it comes to the issues before us, particularly when they pertain to financial issues and making sure new schools are built.

My staff have sent over to me here that Mr. McGuinty is touring schools today to try to force them to agree to his—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Empty schools. He tours empty schools.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Empty schools. If Mr. McGuinty goes to a school next week and there are actually children and teachers in a classroom, I will be shocked. He has done the summer tour of empty schools and classrooms. In fact, I went to one with him last week in his own riding of Ottawa South.

Speaker, I just want to go back, as we have amended this motion, to talk about what Don Drummond told them, to point out that we have some serious problems here in Ontario. If we're going to triple Ontario's debt and deficit as they have done in their short decade in office—a dark decade indeed—there are consequences.

Let me say what a direct consequence is. Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School, a school I was proud to be part of getting built, a school that I'm proud to continue to fight for, is a brand new school.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Who built that school?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: The taxpayers.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The taxpayers built the school. I fought in this House for the school to be built. That school now has close to 20 portables in it. The kids are taking gym class in the halls, because the gym is now classrooms. That is how full that school is. This will be the first year in its five years in existence when there will actually be a grade 12 class. They were operating from 7 to 9, then 7 to 10, then 7 to 11. This will be the first year they'll have 7 to 12. That school will be expanding, busting out of its seams, and do you want to know what we hear from this government when those taxpaying parents are sending their kids to school? "There's no money." And then they bring a non-binding motion, a political smallitics motion to this assembly to influence the people of Kitchener-Waterloo—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, the school board in Ottawa's capital plan is not before the House. What is before the House is this particular motion, and I would remind the member of standing order 23(b), which instructs her to direct her speech to the matter at hand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Once again, I thank the member for his point of order, but it will be my decision to the member whether I feel she has drifted

from the situation. Thank you for your point of order. It has been taken under consideration.

Continue.

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Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to actually have a page take over our amendment to show that this is in order, if you wouldn't mind, to Mississauga-Streetsville's finest over there. Maybe he can send back a note on why they spent \$190 million cancelling a power plant at the expense of the students in his community and mine.

But, Speaker, I tell you this, and I say it emphatically: There are choices one must make when one is in government. They have not done that. The easiest choices have always been to add a new tax to Ontario students' parents' pockets. Now they bring forward this motion, which is offensive. They've passed this resolution. This is about smallitics. It has nothing to do with whether or not they're going to proceed with full-day learning. It has nothing to do with whether or not they're going to curb the cost of government. It has nothing to do with students in Ontario. It has everything to do with wedge politics.

I will tell you something, Speaker: If they want to start talking about students, let's talk about the students in Longfields-Davidson Heights. Let's talk about the students in Riverside South. Let's talk about the students in Bells Corners. Let's talk about the students in Lisa Thompson's riding who are worried that they're not going to have a community school in a rural riding because this government did not have the courage to make the tough decisions when they should have made the tough decisions. Instead, they decided to saddle the students of the next generation so that they could pay the debt and the deficit, so that those students won't have schools in rural communities like Huron-Bruce.

That is what they have done. They have tripled the size of the debt in this province. That debt alone is the third-largest spending priority of this government. Every single dollar spent to service that debt and deficit is one dollar taken away from the kids in Huron-Bruce, who do not have a rural school right now in one of their communities. That is what this government has done and that is why we emphatically, emphatically oppose the direction of this government. That is why we will continue to bail them out on their wage-freeze agenda, although it is not strong enough. But we are going to stick to our principles, we are going to stick to our guns and we are going to read to them their own advice from their own hand-picked economic adviser, Don Drummond, who told them that they needed to make choices; they needed to make offsets.

That's why we amended this silly little motion that is designed to do nothing more than waste the opposition's time because they want to play politics, smallitics, and try to win a seat—a seat that they have to buy. It's the second one this year they've tried to buy. This is shameful. If this were anywhere else in any other House in the entire country, I'm sure the RCMP or the OPP would be investigating it, because those are taxpayer dollars.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member is suggesting that there may have been some wrongdoing, that the police would have to be called in. The member will withdraw that statement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You withdraw the statement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I wouldn't have.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: One can certainly think it, however.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need comments like that, that you "wouldn't have," because if you hadn't, you would have been gone. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker.

I have about 14 minutes left in this debate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You've got three minutes left.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —three minutes left in this debate, Speaker, before we go into the calmer waters called question period. I'm looking forward to today's questions, because it's an opportunity to continue on the accountability exercise that we have just displayed here in this House today on behalf of the official opposition. We'll be able to ask a lot of questions about why they're blowing money at a Mississauga power plant. We'll be able to ask questions about why Deb Matthews still has a job, for example, because the money that she's blowing and wasting and not overseeing could be used for patients in hospitals. It could also be used, let's be honest, for students in classrooms.

With the three minutes that I do have left, I'm just going to once again read Don Drummond's recommendations.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I just remind my colleagues that Don Drummond has serious concerns with this government. He's one of their own, so it should be very difficult for them. But this is what he says: "Given the difficulties with such an approach, and the prohibitive cost of the program overall at this time, the commission"—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Don Drummond, Bob Chiarelli's buddy—"recommends cancellation of the full-day kindergarten ... program, without prejudice to schools that already had FDK before the introduction of this ... strategy."

We paid \$1,500 a day for that recommendation. They're ignoring it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House is recessed till 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It is my pleasure—I'm not sure it's their pleasure, but it is my pleasure—to introduce my two children, Dawson and Jamie Gillies.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my pleasure to introduce the mayor of Englehart, Nina Wallace, as well as Brian Kelly and Shawn O'Donnell from the general chairpersons' association.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to welcome Jenny Peng, a former legislative page for the assembly, as well as a constituent of mine from Scarborough-Agincourt. Welcome back, Jenny.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, one of my summer students, Terryn Peplinskie, who will be leaving at the end of August. This is an opportunity for a summer student to actually be in the Legislature when it's in session, which is unusual. Welcome, Terryn.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It gives me great pleasure to introduce a special guest here this morning. Moriah Harrington-Gibbs is my summer intern, and she has come all the way from the great town of Cobourg to be with us this morning. Welcome, Moriah.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'd like to introduce a real survivor friend of mine. He's a retired CAW worker. He has survived multiple heart attacks, bypass surgery, is fighting his second bout of cancer and had two open brain surgeries. Join me in welcoming Mr. Bob Holdon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Introduction of guests?

Mr. Mario Sergio: Mr. Speaker, if you insist, I'll introduce my new seatmate here, the fantastic member from Scarborough East-Pickering.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. The current legislation before the House is going to pass. We want to make sure our kids are back in school on the very first day of school. They shouldn't pay the price, nor should their parents, for your mishandling of this issue. The test is whether this was a conversion of convenience for you or if you're actually going to get serious about reducing spending, reining in the size and cost of government.

Premier, on June 21 of this year, the Toronto Star revealed how much the Toronto District School Board was paying for things, like \$143 to install a pencil sharpener while placing four screws. The union billed for 76 hours for four hours' work to install an electrical outlet in a library, to the cost of \$3,000 to the taxpayer. Premier, since this news came out in June, could you please tell us what you've done to fix this mess?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. Again, on behalf of Ontario students and parents and

families generally, I thank my colleague for the support that he's going to lend to us with respect to our bill, Putting Students First.

I do want to take the opportunity as well to celebrate yet another achievement inside publicly funded schools in Ontario. Today we're proud to announce that our EQAO test scores have gone up yet again. In fact, since 2003 they've gone up 16 points. I want to give credit once again where credit is due, and that's to students, parents, but especially teachers, and all those partners on the education team who work so hard day in and day out to put Ontario students first.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't think I got an answer from the Premier on this question, so let me try again. Premier, Bill 115 is going to pass. The question is, what comes next?

I had hoped that we had seen a crack in the door and that we could pry it open to get you back on the path of fiscal sanity, the kind of path that the PC caucus has laid out. So let me ask you again: We saw a week-plus of exposé about this odious practice of closed tendering, where one union gets all the contracts—guaranteed. Jimmy Hazel, head of the union, became a bit of a character around this place with a \$143 pencil sharpener and \$19,000 for a front-lawn school sign that should have cost one tenth of that.

Premier, I hope that the light switch did go on over there. Surely, you must have acted back in June and given direction to end this odious practice. Please tell me what you did in the last couple of months to fix this mess.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague would know that the Minister of Education has spoken to this issue. He will also know that the Toronto District School Board has taken specific steps to address the issues that were raised.

But I think it is noteworthy, Speaker, that you don't have to scratch the surface too much before my honourable colleague pursues his anti-union rant. That's not an approach that we're prepared to pursue. We think we've got a responsibility to find ways to bring people together to continue to make progress in our schools and in health care and in growing the economy.

So we will not be firing teachers and we will not be abandoning full-day kindergarten.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, this isn't anti-union; it's anti-corruption. It's \$3,000 to fix a light socket, \$143 for a pencil sharpener and stories of kickbacks to the union bosses, who, by the way, helped out your Liberal candidates in the last campaign. Surely, you'll rise above this. You will see the light of day that we need to actually get these costs under control and get the best deal for the taxpayer at the end of the day.

Premier, as you may know, the Greater Essex County District School Board is now forced to go to the courts to

fight this mess. They've spent about \$400,000 to date that could have gone to kids in the classrooms.

Surely, Premier, you will stand up and do the right thing and end this odious practice of closed tendering and special backroom deals, and allow the best contractor at the best price at the best quality to get the job for savings in the classroom—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sit down, please.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, we are not going to be taking over all Ontario school boards, which is the logical conclusion one would draw from the line of questioning—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): You've asked the question. Once again I ask you to listen to the answer. You've been pretty good all week, but you're starting very early today.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will do my very best to keep the temperature down, Speaker.

I'm not prepared to take over all Ontario school boards. We have continuing confidence and faith—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No, no; there's a difference.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: By way of information, Speaker, there's a difference between one school board and all school boards. So I say again: We're not prepared to take over all Ontario school boards. We continue to have faith and confidence in the people who work in our school boards. I think they're becoming ever more mindful of our fiscal reality and of their responsibility to ensure that they're mindful of taxpayer dollars. What we're doing is our part in this Legislature by moving ahead with our bill putting students first.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): New question.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. The Premier said he's not about to take over every school board in the province. Premier, you just did, in your failed negotiating process with the unions. I've never seen the like, Speaker, of somebody answering a question and then heckling themselves during the questioning. I didn't think that was possible.

Premier, I know that you're stumbling on this issue because I believe in your heart you know it's wrong that the Jimmy Hazels of the world are controlling the purse strings. I think you believe in your heart that contracts should be awarded to the best quality and the best price to the taxpayer. I think, Premier, you know in your heart

that it's wrong for the Essex county district school board to have to pay \$400,000—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Excuse me. I said, "New question." You're leading into a similar question.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I tend to be consistent in my questions, Speaker. This is a question to the Premier. It is a question about spending in our public services.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Question.
1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, \$400,000 that could have gone to kids in our classrooms, special-needs kids, has now gone into court cases because you've failed to act. Surely, back in June you would have said this was wrong; you would have directed action to take place. A PC government would close the odious practice of closed tendering and the secret backroom deals. It's the right thing to do.

Premier, can you demonstrate you're actually serious about reining in costs? Stop the inaction, get out of your paralysis, do the right thing, and end this odious practice.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to repeat some of the information provided by the Minister of Education earlier on the subject of the Toronto District School Board and the particular issue being raised by my colleague. It's our expectation that boards make the best use of our public education dollars. The TDSB and all Ontario school boards are obligated to ensure that they're getting the best value for the dollars they spend, in all circumstances.

As part of their budget deliberations, the TDSB has asked the province to assist the board in a review of their operation, and we agreed to provide this support. The scope of these reviews are based on a school board's specific needs and are determined by the board. PWC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, will be conducting this review, and we understand that they will request that the review focus on facilities maintenance. We're taking specific action in that particular matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Some of the students in the classes who will be \$400,000 short because of your inaction would describe that answer as rather lame, Premier. Get to the core of the issue: End this odious practice of closed tendering. It just seems wrong. I know taxpayers in their guts say you shouldn't hand over the same contract to the same public sector union year after year, no matter what the quality of service, no matter what the price, especially when you see this kind of abuse and arrogance in the system.

Premier, we had hoped that you had seen the light of day. At least bring in a partial wage freeze. You're adopting part of the PC plan, but surely you need to go farther to make sure we get every dollar we can in savings to invest in the classroom, to balance the books. Please tell me why you're backing the Jimmy Hazels of the world, why you refuse to act, why the Essex county board has to spend this money. Will you do the right

thing? Open the tendering so you get the best quality for the students in the classrooms and pass on savings to the taxpayers who pay the bills.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague says he stands for students in the classroom. He would pull the rug out from under 250,000 four- and five-year-olds by abandoning full-day kindergarten, so he can't stand there and tell us he's for students. He would fire 10,000 Ontario teachers in order to increase class sizes, so he can't stand there and tell us he's in favour of Ontario students.

We're very much aware of their record. Strikes were commonplace in this province. Academic performance suffered in this province. We have dramatically turned things around by working with our teachers, working with students, working with parents. We'll put our schools up against any schools on this planet.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sit down, please. Order.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Pembroke-Nipissing-Renfrew, could you just keep your voice down a little?

Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's a shame the Premier continues to look the other way when there are questions of abject corruption in the handing out of contracts, kickbacks and the hundreds of dollars that went to individual union members who helped out on campaigns.

This is a question of doing the right thing, making changes. If the Premier were actually serious about reining in the size and cost of government, he would end this odious practice, he'd close the loophole where 98% of bureaucrats got bonuses last year when their wages were supposed to be frozen, and he would bring in an across-the-board public sector wage freeze.

Premier, can you please demonstrate that you're serious? Will you at least agree to an across-the-board freeze on spending and bring in an economic statement soon that will actually reduce the size and cost of government and fix this kind of corruption that you're turning a blind eye to?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have a decidedly different approach when it comes to managing our fiscal challenge. We believe we should be protecting education, we should be protecting health care, we should be protecting children and our social services, and our budget reflects that. At the same time, Speaker, we said that we were committed to achieving our fiscal objectives, and we will do so.

We reject the approach that they promote, Speaker. They would fire thousands of teachers; we reject that. They would abandon full-day kindergarten. They would fire thousands of educational support workers, who are powerful contributors to the success of our students in our schools. That's a decidedly different approach, Speaker. It lacks balance. It lacks coherence. It lacks a synchronicity with Ontario values shared by Ontario fam-

ilies. They want us to protect our schools; we're going to do that. They want us to protect our health care; we're going to do that. They want us to eliminate the deficit, and we'll do that, too.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Just a few weeks ago, Liberal MPPs voted to defeat a Conservative bill that would impose solutions and violate Canada's Constitution. Can the Premier tell us today, Speaker, what advice he has received from his own caucus regarding his new plan to do exactly the same thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm delighted to receive the question from my honourable colleague, the leader of the NDP. I know that she's going to want to acknowledge as well the progress that we've made in Ontario schools yet again. EQAO test scores are up 1% more, up 16 points since 2003. That is surely something worthy of celebration. McKinsey & Company, the world's largest consulting institute, has said that we've got the best schools in the English-speaking world. The Economist just last year said that we have one of the world's best-performing school systems.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member for Northumberland—Quinte West come to order, please.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Over 5,000 people have been to Ontario from around the world to come and see how we do education so well. So I'd begin by asking my honourable colleague to acknowledge the success that we've made in our schools and how much of that, Speaker, is attributable to hard-working Ontario teachers.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, at least one Liberal MPP made a point of distancing himself from the government's plan and indicated that he wasn't sure whether or not he could support it. It's not surprising, Speaker. The Premier himself has noted that this sort of simplistic, reckless plan is likely to be thrown out by the courts and cost us hundreds of millions of dollars.

Is the Premier willing to give his MPPs a free vote, or does he plan to force them to support his simplistic, unconstitutional legislation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, my honourable colleague is nothing if not proficient in raising issues related to process. Process is important. I'm very confident we're doing everything that we need to do to ensure that our legislation is, in fact, constitutional.

But here's where we really part company. My honourable colleague believes that we can afford to give teachers a pay raise at this point in time. I don't believe that we can do that. I think we've got to make a difficult choice, and that choice is to protect the progress that we've made in our classrooms and to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten. That's an important distinction between that party and this government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everybody in Ontario, including the Premier, knows that pay freezes have already been agreed to by the teachers. Everybody knows that the Premier's plan has everything to do with winning by-elections and nothing to do with helping kids in the classroom. Even the Premier's own MPPs are tired of seeing him play politics with our kids. When is he going to stop focusing on by-election politics and start focusing on real solutions for this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, in terms of reality, I think we should acknowledge the real progress that we have made in our schools. We've built 570 new schools. I think it's important to remember that the PCs closed 500. We've invested in 27,000 school renewal projects. We've hired more than 13,000 more teachers and more than 10,000 educational support workers. We're investing in full-day kindergarten. We've invested in smaller classes. It's paying off for families and for students in particular. Test scores are way up. Graduation rates are way up. We've got more young people going on to college, university and apprenticeships than ever before.

I take issue with my honourable colleague. The fact of the matter is, Ontario schools are working, and they're working for Ontario students.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. There are real challenges that are facing Ontario families, and the government has made it pretty clear that they're more concerned about themselves.

1050

First, they recalled the Legislature in a desperate attempt to create a crisis in our schools. Then this morning they forced a debate on full-day kindergarten, a program that isn't even at risk, a program that's not even at risk of being at risk.

When is the Premier going to stop focusing on his own desperate attempts to win majority power and start focusing on the real challenges that we have been sent here to deal with?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague may be uninterested in full-day kindergarten, but I would encourage her to talk to Ontario parents, especially parents of—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would urge everybody to be a little softer because I'm having difficulty hearing the person asking the question and also the person giving the answer.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, the single most popular initiative that has been introduced into publicly funded education in the last 25 years is full-day kindergarten. It's very important to young families; it's very important to parents of younger children. Leaving aside the fact it saves a family \$6,500 in child care costs on an annual basis per child, it lays a powerful foundation for

learning throughout school. It means a child is more likely to do well at school, to finish high school, to go on to college, university or apprenticeship, get a good job, earn a good living and pass on that standard to their own family. That all starts in the early years. That's why we're so committed to full-day kindergarten.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats are glad that the Liberals finally took our advice on all-day learning in the province of Ontario. But if the Premier needs an update on the other challenges that are facing families—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. I am not getting through to all of you, so from here on in, I'm going to give you the last warning if I single you out, because I'm having real difficulty hearing the question and I also have people on the side of me complaining about the language being used.

Carry on.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the Premier needs an update on the challenges that are facing families, we can provide one. A new report today indicates that nearly half of Ontario families are seeing their family household incomes stagnating or in fact declining. Households in Ontario are paying more for health care user fees, for classroom fees and tuition fees than any households in the rest of Canada.

When will the Premier start looking at these kinds of challenges and stop trying to create a crisis to win by-elections?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Returning to the original subject of full-day kindergarten, I will say to my honourable colleague that when we first introduced that by way of a budget, they voted against that budget. When we introduced a measure in our most recent budget to expand full-day kindergarten, they wouldn't vote for or against it.

When it comes to household costs, we are sensitive to that issue; it is real and it is pressing. Again, full-day kindergarten saves a family \$6,500 per child on an annual basis. We've also introduced the Ontario child benefit, the only program of its kind in Canada, which is providing a family with \$1,100 per child. Then there's our tuition grant. This year, it will save a university student \$1,600 and a college student \$800.

So the truth is, we are mindful of cost concerns in our families and we are reaching out to them with our initiatives.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yes, Speaker, it's true: New Democrats don't support Liberal budgets that leave families falling behind in this province. New Democrats are ready to get to work on the challenges that are actually facing the people of this province. We want to see the Legislature focus on creating good jobs, for example; improving our health care system; and helping families recover from very tough times. Instead, we have a gov-

ernment that's happy to watch families fall behind while they focus on themselves and their drive for a majority government.

The Premier has brought us here two weeks early. When is he going to stop playing politics himself and start working on the challenges that families in this province are facing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think if there's one dream shared by all our families, it is that the children will do well, that they will find success, that they will find opportunity, that they will become the very best that they can be, and that we build that opportunity, we build the foundation for those dreams, inside Ontario's publicly funded schools.

So if my honourable colleague had the genuine concern—and I believe she does—about families and their hopes and aspirations, then I'm sure she will want to continue to support our measures that will continue to expand full-day kindergarten until finally it's available in all of our elementary schools to ensure that we reach out to all 250,000 four- and five-year-olds in Ontario, so we're building that foundation for success and we can do it in keeping with the hopes and dreams shared by all parents.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. This morning at 9 a.m., the public accounts committee investigating the Ornge scandal convened. Last week, that same committee issued a formal request to the Premier to appear as a witness. At 9 a.m. this morning, the Premier, who had refused to appear at the committee, hosted a photo op with the press gallery at an empty school.

On the eve of the appearance of Chris Mazza, here's what the Premier said: "I know our committee members have a lot of questions. They are interested in putting questions to Dr. Mazza, and I think it's an opportunity for us to get to the bottom of a lot of things, which, but for his testimony, would be very difficult for us to ascertain."

Speaker, the Premier was right. We had a lot of questions for Chris Mazza, but we also have a lot of questions for the Premier. The committee wants to hear from the Premier. The public wants to hear from the Premier. Why is he refusing to appear at the committee? What is he hiding and who is he protecting?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. Sit down, please.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What my honourable colleague dismisses in terms of my appearance this morning with the media was in fact an opportunity for the media to put questions to me on Ornge and any other matter, as they in fact did.

I appear in this House on a regular basis. If my honourable colleague has a question related to Ornge, I

would encourage him to ask yet another question on the subject matter of Ornge to me in this House.

Having said that, my colleague the Minister of Health has appeared before the committee on three separate occasions. She has specific responsibility for the portfolio and this issue, but again I say to my honourable colleague: If he has questions related to Ornge, I'm here today and he should put the questions to me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: My question to the Premier is very simple: Why do you refuse to appear at the committee? We're asking for one hour of your time where you can ask and answer the questions that we have for you.

The Premier has refused to answer questions about Ornge in this House on numerous occasions. He now joins the company of Dr. Chris Mazza. Only two people in this province have refused to appear at the committee: Chris Mazza and the Premier. The difference is that we could compel Chris Mazza with a Speaker's warrant. The Premier knows that he is immune because he's the Premier.

I'm going to ask him a very simple question. What are you hiding? Who are you protecting? Why do you not want to appear at our committee?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Sit down. Can I have everyone seated?

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that there is a difference between myself and Dr. Mazza in terms of our appearance, in terms of our availability for questions. He doesn't appear in this Legislature on a regular basis for question period; I do.

There are just under 34 minutes left in this question period, Speaker. I encourage my honourable colleague, if he's got a question, to put the question to me.

I think what is more important here is, it's time for the committee to come forward with some positive, substantive recommendations so that we can act on those, and, together with Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, we can move forward and do what is required under the public interest.

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COMMITTEE WITNESSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. A recent witness at the public accounts committee on Ornge was suspended almost immediately following his testimony. The details of his suspension are shaky at best. The protection of witnesses is vital to uncovering what went wrong at Ornge so we can learn and move forward.

Given all of this, did the Minister of Health ask Ornge to provide details or justification for this suspension?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have been assured that this human resources issue had nothing to do with the

appearance before the committee. In fact, we have had several staff members of Ornge appearing before the committee. I believe that this morning we will have yet another Ornge pilot appearing before the committee.

I think it's important that people at Ornge have that opportunity to speak, but what I also think is important is that we move forward. The committee has met for 81 hours; there have been 56 witnesses. I think it's time for the committee to stop playing politics and start being part of the solution when it comes to Ornge. We must get Bill 50 passed. We must get the recommendations of the committee, and I really do hope that if the members opposite are sincere in their determination to do what's right for Ontarians, they will do exactly that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wish I could take the minister at her word when she says she has been assured, but we have been assured of many things about Ornge and none of them turned out to be true. If it's true that things have changed at Ornge, but we hear witnesses saying that they've been intimidated, it brings all of it into question that maybe the changes are not really changes. When my colleagues and I heard about the suspension, automatically the alarm bells went on.

My question is simple. Did this suspension also raise alarm bells for this government and for this minister and, if so, what have they done to ensure that the committee can carry on its work unhindered?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I say, I think it's important that if there are any people at Ornge who want to be part of this process, we welcome that. In fact, we've had letters from dozens of Ornge pilots who support the actions this government has taken. The voice of that front-line staff at Ornge is vitally important to me.

What we need to do now is, we need the committee to come forward with their recommendations. We need the Legislature to pass Bill 50. We've seen significant progress at Ornge, but we haven't finished the job yet. We need the support of all members of this Legislature to do what needs to be done at Ornge. Pass Bill 50. Get the recommendations from the committee.

WATER SUPPLY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. In my riding of Guelph and across southern Ontario this summer there has been a lot of hot weather, very little rain. In fact, when the Premier visited Guelph in July, there was considerable media coverage of the dry weather's impact on agriculture in southwestern Ontario and the impacts on yields of corn and soybean crops especially, as well as a concern about the availability of livestock forage.

Minister, can you, through the Speaker, inform this House of the steps you've taken to assist farmers in this very difficult dry growing season?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the member for the question. I've seen the

effects of weather throughout the summer, and I want to thank all of the farmers who took time to show me the difficulties they were experiencing.

We've asked the federal government to work with us to assess if relief is appropriate under the AgriRecovery program, which is a federal-provincial program.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: Come to order, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: While the AgriRecovery assessment is ongoing, interim payments—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, this is my last warning to you because you're totally ignoring me.

Minister.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Interim payments under our existing programs, agri-stability and production insurance, are available for producers who are experiencing financial distress.

We also asked the federal government to accelerate their review of prescribed drought regions, and I'm thankful they have done that. That came out yesterday. That will help farmers, through some tax credits, if they have to cull some of their livestock. That tax is spread out over a number of years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We've also insured farmers in these—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Minister. My supplementary is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, water is always a hot topic in Guelph, because we are dependent on groundwater. The hot, dry conditions that we've seen this summer have caused significant concerns for my constituents about their water supply.

Minister McMeekin has already shared with this House the many things his ministry has done for farmers. I know that your ministry, in partnership with conservation authorities, plays a significant role in monitoring our province's water levels and the water supply within local communities.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please tell the members of this House what your ministry is doing to monitor the current low-water situation in Guelph and across much of the province?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks again to the member from Guelph for asking this very important question. Certainly, our government understands that the hot, dry weather across the province has had a profound impact on our farmers and the economy. My colleague the Minister of Agriculture and I have had a number of conversations over the summer, and frankly I think we should—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West, this is your last warning.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: —applaud Minister McMeekin for his persistence and for his advocacy on behalf of Ontario farmers.

Certainly, our Ministry of Natural Resources does play an important role in providing up-to-date and immediate information to conservation authorities, to municipalities and to our local partners regarding ever-changing water levels in our area watersheds. We share the concerns expressed by a number of conservation authorities about prolonged lower-than-normal water levels in some of our lakes and rivers. That's why, through our low-water response teams, we're working very closely with them to encourage voluntary reduction in water use. We are continuing to monitor water levels on a daily basis in order to support those community efforts, and we'll be working closely with all of our partners, obviously including the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. It's good to have hung around for it, too.

For months now, the public accounts committee has been trying to get to the bottom of exactly how your government allowed the mess at Ornge to happen. The committee has heard how former Liberal Party president Alf Apps lobbied on behalf of Ornge and arranged for Chris Mazza to brief you on what he was up to. But you have refused to appear before the committee to explain what you knew about the developing scandal at Ornge. You claimed in this House that you've met Chris Mazza maybe once. In committee, Mazza said that he had multiple meetings with you. Someone's not telling the truth.

Why won't you agree to testify to the committee and put on the record exactly what you knew and when you knew it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm pleased to receive the question, and I'm pleased to answer it yet again. To the very best of my recollection, I met Dr. Mazza on one occasion only. That was in Sudbury in the context of an emergency response plan. It may have been that I met Dr. Mazza in the course of a—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —as I have previously said in this House, as I have previously said in this Legislature, at a fundraiser. Speaker, I meet thousands and thousands of people during the course of a year, some at fundraisers and some at political events of another nature. That is, to the very best of my understanding and recollection, my connection with Dr. Mazza.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

1110

Mr. John Yakabuski: I don't know, Premier. Perhaps you bumped into Chris Mazza at your photo op at the empty school this morning. I don't know. But if you have nothing to hide, then why won't you testify?

That committee compels you to testify under oath. The citizens of Ontario have the right to know what you knew, when you knew it, and the details of any discussions you had with Chris Mazza. You have a duty to testify so that the public can be assured that the failures of your government that allowed this scandal to happen will not be repeated. Or are you afraid of reminding them of your government's dismal record on this issue? Is your refusal to testify yet another cynical attempt to try to influence the by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan, or is it, Premier, that your testimony under oath to that committee would leave you with no option but to call for the resignation of your Minister of Health?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Sit down.

I would ask the member to withdraw his statement where he's imputing motive to the Premier, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is a real issue associated with Ornge, and we acknowledge that in government. Speaker, we have accepted that there was a failure on our part to bring the necessary oversight to bear. We want to put in place the necessary measures to correct that going forward. We have a bill, Bill 50. It's called An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. That's been delayed by my honourable colleagues in the opposition for five months now.

We would ask that the committee, sooner rather than later, complete its work. It has heard from 54 witnesses. It has sat for 16 days. It has worked for 75 hours. We would be most grateful—and I say this sincerely, Speaker—to receive substantive recommendations from the committee members so that we can take any additional steps that are necessary to protect the public interest.

I say to my honourable colleagues once again: Get that work completed; help us move ahead with Bill 50, and let's do what we need to do to protect the public interest.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. As we all know, the Northlander passenger train will be cancelled on September 28 through a decision of your government. Northern mayors continue to call on you to honour your pledge to keep Ontario Northland in public hands. Today, Alice Murphy, mayor of the township of Muskoka Lakes, has joined her northern colleagues in urging your government to enhance northern passenger train service instead of cancelling it. Her reason: The

Northlander could be a vital link in the provincial strategy to lessen gridlock on the 400 to cottage country and beyond.

Premier, will you listen to the people across Ontario and announce that you are changing your plan to cancel the Northlander and give us time to use it as a tool to help the province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We will continue to listen to the people of Ontario, as we have in the past. The people of Ontario told us that we have to get our fiscal house in order in order to invest in health care and in education. The people of Ontario told us that a \$400 subsidy per ride on the Northlander is not sustainable or acceptable. The people from northern Ontario and the people from Ontario have told us that we have to make changes to ensure that we're able to fund the priorities that they sent us to govern for, and we will be doing that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is again to the Premier. That is exactly the point that Mayor Murphy was making. No one's asking for the status quo here, but you've got a rail line running along the 400; on the weekends, the 400 is a parking lot. All she's asking, all we're all asking—one change would make a huge difference: We change it from a day train to a night train; then people could go on the Northlander to their cottage and back, and get off the highway. That's not rocket science, but no one's looking. We are all looking for ways to save money.

Once again, are we really going to—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Regarding consultation, northerners want to talk before decisions are made, not after.

Once again, Premier, will you reconsider, look at the whole picture and see if we can use that to lessen the financial burden on all Ontarians?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member should know that the night train was tried a long time ago. It was cancelled by a previous government because it didn't have the ridership to have it continue. Clearly we have had, over the course of the last nine years, \$430 million invested in trying to make the ONTC a viable operation. The reality is, we're looking at decreasing revenues, increasing costs, a \$100-million subsidy this year. That's no longer affordable. The people of Ontario have told us quite clearly, "We want you to invest in the priorities," those priorities—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Answer.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: —that they sent us here to govern: health care and education.

We're divesting. We're allowing the private sector to come and put their footprint in northern Ontario to help provide a sustainable, an efficient and an effective transportation system not only for now, but also in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Next question. The member for Peterborough.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The total disrespect being shown today to finish question period is really not appreciated. Some of you are carrying on no matter what I say to you. Please.

The member for Peterborough.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I think my mother-in-law's watching this morning.

My question is to the Minister of Energy. Minister, since the launch of the Green Energy Act in 2009, Ontario has become a global leader in green energy initiatives. We all know that through the introduction of the act, our government has cleaned up the air we breathe and is on track to eliminate the use of dirty coal in our energy supply mix by 2014.

I understand that the Minister of Energy conducted the scheduled two-year review of the FIT program. Since the introduction of the program, I've seen the implementation of clean, renewable energy across Ontario and the jobs and investment that have come along with it.

Minister, could you please share with this House some of the successes of the Green Energy Act and the FIT/microFIT program thus far?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member from Peterborough, I know, is very interested in the workings of the Green Energy Act. We were actually up in his community touring a solar farm and speaking with the head of the Ontario Waterpower Association, Paul Norris, about some possibilities.

We did bring in the Green Energy Act to accelerate getting out of coal. That's best for the health of Ontarians, because burning coal creates dirty air. That makes people sick. It was costing us \$4 billion a year on the tax base to pay for those illnesses. So we're getting out of coal by the end of 2014.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Prince Edward-Hastings, if you're going to heckle, you have to sit in your seat.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Green Energy Act has allowed us to create already over 20,000 jobs in the province of Ontario, over \$27 billion worth of investments, and it is a vibrant industry that's already exporting around the world, working with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade.

Interjection.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What the review—and I'll speak to that in a moment—has enabled us to do is to strengthen the approach, solidify the jobs here in Ontario, and provide further opportunities to accelerate getting out of coal, bring on new jobs, attract new investment and protect the health of Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know that my constituents would be pleased to hear about our government's continued commitment to a strong green economy. Many businesses and families awaited the results of the FIT review and subsequent rules to see what the future of the program will entail for all Ontarians.

I'm aware that some of these goals and new program changes are to increase what I consider very important community participation and make the application process move forward more efficiently so that the success of the program can continue well into the future. Minister, can you please highlight some of the new rules and changes to the program and how they will affect Ontario families and indeed businesses?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's an important point, because when we conducted the review, we heard from over 3,100 Ontarians: families, businesses, associations, including from my colleague the member from Peterborough, who is interested in the solar and the water power issues. He'll be pleased to know that there are still strong opportunities for water power in the new review.

1120

What's the result? Prices are down. The rules are posted. The small microFIT program is accepting applications. We've increased community participation priority and increased municipal participation priority, meaning that where a community participates and municipalities approve, they're more likely to get the project. We've placed it on a sustainable footing so we can continue to clean the air, attract investment and provide jobs here in the province of Ontario.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: The public accounts committee has now spent months investigating the Ornge air ambulance scandal, a scandal that has seen hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars misappropriated, has seen the safety of patients put at risk, all on your watch, Premier. Public accounts has received and assembled thousands of pages of evidence and background materials. We've sat for 16 days. We've heard from over 50 witnesses. We've tabled thousands of questions.

The lack of proper administration, accountability and oversight by your government is appalling. But one piece of the puzzle remains missing: Premier, when will you be able to free up your schedule to come before public accounts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Here I am yet again. I'm prepared to take questions, but there was not a question in that supposed question.

My honourable colleague is in fact making the argument for us. The committee has collected thousands of pages of evidence. To date, they've heard from 54 witnesses. They've expended 16 days, 75 hours. The work has been nothing if not thorough and exhaustive. I think

we are fast approaching a point in time where it serves the public interest—not the partisan interests of my colleagues opposite—that we receive recommendations, substantive in nature, that we could then act on.

I am genuinely interested in learning what it is that we might do and learn from this experience by receiving recommendations that we can adopt not only insofar as the Ornge matter is concerned, Speaker, but more broadly in terms of how we deal with our agencies, boards and commissions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Public accounts has heard testimony from Mr. Alfred Apps, a former Liberal Party president, and has the following email from Alf Apps written in 2007: “Last nite worked perfectly. Chris was able to make a real connection with the Premier, and to lay out the success story of Ornge at a high level in a way that provides”—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Energy, I called upon you twice and you totally ignored me. Would you please come to order? This is my last warning.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'll just finish the quote: “... the success story ... at a high level in a way that provides the groundwork for our entire initiative.”

Premier, did your night with Chris Mazza, CEO of Ornge, work perfectly? Is it true Chris Mazza was able to make a real connection with you? Did he lay out the success story of Ornge for your perusal? Did this night provide the groundwork for the entire initiative?

Premier, you couldn't attend previously because of a cabinet meeting. Will you now attend public accounts—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Premier, answer?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In addition to our genuine interest in any substantive recommendations that might come forward from the committee's important work, we ask ourselves: Why is it the opposition has delayed passage of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. Why have they delayed its passage for five months thus far? That's a long time.

They say that they are interested in moving ahead with the Ornge matter. They're interested in learning whatever lessons that we might. They're interested in ensuring that we put in place new measures to ensure that that kind of thing is not repeated. Insofar as all that is concerned, I am inside. But I think, at this point in time, it's time for us to receive recommendations from the committee's work, and it's time for us to move forward with Bill 50 together.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. There are 20,000 families in Kitchener-Waterloo who can't find a family doctor. But it goes far beyond

family doctors, Speaker. Kitchener-Waterloo is facing a shortage of psychiatrists. In fact, the Waterloo Record just featured the story this week.

New Democrats have a plan to get more doctors into underserved communities. Will this government actually work with New Democrats on our ideas to bring more doctors to underserved areas like Kitchener-Waterloo?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Peterborough, come to order, please. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much for the question. Of course, all of us are interested in improving access to health care, and we have made some tremendous success.

I'm sure the member opposite, the leader of the third party, would like to actually celebrate and acknowledge the fact that we now have 134 more physicians working in Waterloo region. That's a 22.3% increase in doctors since we were elected in 2003. We're also very proud of the fact that 96% of residents in Waterloo region do have access to a family doctor. We have made tremendous progress.

Speaker, that's not the only thing that's happening in Kitchener-Waterloo when it comes to improving health care. We've made dramatic improvements in bringing down wait times. Hip replacement wait times have been cut in half, knee replacement wait times are 62% lower, and waits for CT scans are down by 44%.

Things are so much better in Kitchener-Waterloo now, when it comes to health care, than when we took office in 2003.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, there is a shortage of doctors in Kitchener-Waterloo, and that's having an impact on economic development in that region. The Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce has in fact focused on this issue, but it's an uphill battle. The Liberal government is great at coming up with statistics that sound great, but families in Kitchener-Waterloo are telling us on the doorstep that they can't find a doctor.

Is the government prepared to work with New Democrats to bring more doctors to areas like Kitchener-Waterloo, or are they going to continue to play the same old cynical politics and deny that there's a problem?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can tell you that there are communities in this province where we need to get family doctors. In other communities we've made significant progress, and Kitchener-Waterloo is one of those areas where I'm very proud to say that we've got more family health teams. The Centre for Family Medicine family health team, which I've visited, has 16 doctors and 14 health care professionals. It's serving 7,000 patients who were previously unattached.

I would welcome the plan from the NDP. I would love to know what their advice is to us. We've made great

progress. If they've got ideas, of course I'd love to hear them.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. With the construction of condo buildings throughout Ontario's big cities, we have seen several incidents in recent years where glass balcony panels on some high-rise buildings have shattered. This has understandably created a great deal of concern amongst the public, who deserve to know that their homes and neighbourhoods are safe.

Can the minister please tell us what steps the government has taken in response to these incidents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for Richmond Hill for his question. Public safety is the reason that the Ontario building code is as stringent as it is, the reason that the standards are as strong as they are. Following these very serious incidents, we knew that we needed to act quickly, and my ministry convened an expert advisory panel to explore what changes we needed to make to the building code to ensure public safety in the immediate term. That panel included experts from all key sectors—building inspectors, engineers, developers and designers—and the panel presented me with a report that included seven recommendations, all of which we accepted.

Based on that set of recommendations, we have now amended Ontario's building code to address how glass is used in balcony guards, and these new measures actually came into effect on July 1 of this year, so we moved very quickly. The new standards clearly state what type of glass must be used and how it must be installed, depending on how close it is to the edge of the balcony. This will put Ontario at the leading edge of the standards for this kind of balcony glass.

1130

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Minister. I'm very pleased to hear what our government has done to ensure the safety of Ontarians. However, it's important that the public has full confidence in the safety of its buildings, and I would like some more information on how these new amendments to the building code will be applied.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please tell the House how these changes are being administered and what the public can do if they live in a building with glass balconies?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said in my previous response, the amendments to the building code came into effect on July 1, and they apply to any construction for which the building permit is issued on or after that date.

Having said that, we're considering these amendments as interim measures, because we're going to be supporting the Canadian Standards Association in their development of a national standard for the use of glass in balcony guards. Then once that national standard has

been put in place, we'll review the standards we've put in place and determine if further building code amendments will be needed.

Municipalities also have the ability under the Building Code Act to address unsafe conditions in buildings, including the ability to conduct inspections in order to make repairs. The city of Toronto has used these powers to address the issue of balcony glass failures in several buildings, and I understand that the city of Toronto has also been proactively contacting owners of existing buildings to make them aware of changes to the building code and to advise them on steps that they can take to ensure safety for their balcony glass guards.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. So far, the legislative hearings into the Ornge scandal have heard from former Ornge CEO Dr. Chris Mazza, who claims he is a scapegoat, and your health minister, Deb Matthews, who claims she did not know. And you, Premier, are simply refusing to appear before the committee. None of you is taking responsibility for what's happened at Ornge.

Premier, one simple question: Who does the buck stop with in the Dalton McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I am pleased to entertain yet another question on the subject of Ornge. I want to make it clear: We've indicated, I think—at least I have—on at least half a dozen occasions that we take responsibility for failing to bring the necessary oversight in the matter of Ornge. We've said that many times.

The auditor, an independent third party, has taken a close look at this. He's provided us with recommendations and conclusions. We accept all of those wholeheartedly, Speaker.

We have a committee that's doing good work. I think it's time to wind up the committee, Speaker. I ask my honourable colleagues to complete their work and provide us with substantive recommendations.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Bring in the bill.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I hear from my honourable colleague from the Ottawa area, who brings considerable volume to her responsibilities—it's always well appreciated—"Bring in the bill." We brought in the bill a long time ago; it's Bill 50, Speaker. We'd like to move ahead with Bill 50.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: Mr. Speaker, if the buck doesn't stop with the Premier, then who? We know: Don Guy.

The Premier refuses to let his incompetent health minister step down. He refuses to testify amid the disclosure that he and Dr. Mazza had meetings. The Premier's lack of accountability, in my opinion, is in itself a scandal. Premier, there is only one explanation for why you yourself won't testify: You don't want the committee to get to the bottom of the truth about Ornge.

Premier, one simple question again: Just what are you trying to hide?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I haven't been keeping count, but this is maybe the 10th question I have received on the matter of Ornge, and I'd be pleased to take as many as they'd like to put, Speaker. But again, I think it's important for us, and I think Ontarians understand this, to draw a distinction between the game—the game is fun; I understand that. But we have a responsibility in government.

We begin by taking responsibility for the lack of oversight that we should have brought to bear on the matter of Ornge. We accept that. That's not a game, Speaker; that's serious business.

We also have a bill that we have put together based on the auditor's recommendations. We'd like to move forward with that. That's not a game, Speaker; that's serious business.

The Ornge committee can, in fact, complete its serious work, providing us with substantive recommendations at the earliest possible opportunity so we can get on with that. That's not a game, Speaker; that's serious business.

Here on this side of the House, we're focused on the people's serious business.

Mr. Frank Klees: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, the Premier makes reference to Bill 50. Let the record show that the government has not even bothered to call that bill for debate. If the Premier is serious about it, why didn't he call it this morning, rather than a motion that was irrelevant?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would say to the member that that's not a point of order.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GRAND BEND AND AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AWARDS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Each year, the Grand Bend and Area Chamber of Commerce selects Business of the Year and Entrepreneur of the Year recipients from those nominated by the members and residents of the Grand Bend area. The Entrepreneur of the Year Award is for an individual in the business community who best personifies hard work, dedication, initiative, innovation and creativity in operating their business. The recipient is recognized for displaying good business ethics, providing superior customer service and demonstrating commitment to the local community.

This year, the award was given to LeeAnn Powers of Aunt Gussie's Country Dining and Delectables for her ongoing community involvement. When the tornado struck Goderich last year, LeeAnn's highly successful

fundraising efforts for the tornado relief raised \$75,000—again, an outstanding sum of money for an individual. LeeAnn truly embodies all the characteristics of this award.

I'm also pleased to say the Business of the Year Award was given to a company or organization for accomplishments in one or more areas that include environmental consciousness, product research and development, marketing innovation, increased sales, business development, employee relations and product service and quality.

This year, the Huron county playhouse—and I should repeat that—the Huron Country Playhouse in Huron county was this year's award recipient. The Huron Country Playhouse has provided area residents and visitors with 40 years of live entertainment and received this award for their continued investment in live entertainment in our community with the recent \$4-million renovation and refurbishment. Indeed, good news for our area.

TEMISKAMING SHORES SKATE PARK

Mr. John Vanthof: Carter Antila was an avid skateboarder, and he had a dream that a permanent skate park be built in his hometown, Temiskaming Shores. Carter was the kind of guy who had the determination to carry out his dreams but, tragically, he was not given the time. Carter Antila was killed in an accident last year at the age of 19.

To honour his memory, his friends and family focused on an effort to see his dream become a reality, and so the Harder 4 Carter committee was born. Their goal: to raise \$400,000 to build a state-of-the-art skate park venue. They have now raised over \$200,000, \$25,000 of which was donated to the committee by Kraft Canada. This donation was a result of a 24-hour vote-off between two northern Ontario communities.

Temiskaming Shores has 12,000 residents yet, thanks to their friends and surrounding communities, they were able to accumulate 372,000 votes in 24 hours, blowing the competition out of the park. The cheque was presented to the community on Saturday, August 25, as part of the TSN Kraft Celebration Tour. Local residents enjoyed a community barbecue and were part of a live TSN broadcast which showcased our beautiful area to the rest of the country.

On behalf of the community, I would like to recognize TSN and Kraft for this great opportunity. Carter's dream will soon become a reality. A site has been chosen along the lake and construction is slated to start in the spring.

On behalf of all the constituents of my riding, I would like to thank the Harder 4 Carter committee for their hard work to see this dream become a reality. Although he will not be here to enjoy it, it will be a venue that Carter would have loved.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This summer, I had the opportunity to attend several family-oriented community

events, and I met many parents who understand the incredible value of strong child care. Only strong child care during their formative years can ensure a strong foundation for a happy, healthy and bright future for Ontario children.

Our government understands this mantra, and this is why it has continuously taken steps to realize a more seamless and integrated system to support families and their young children.

I'm proud to share with this House that our government is investing \$90 million in 2012 and 2013, which will help during the transition to the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

On June 27, 2012, our government released a discussion paper on the modernization of child care in Ontario. These discussions are geared towards achieving increased affordability, quality and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the families in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South and across Ontario will benefit from these discussions.

LAKE NIPISSING WALLEYE FISHERY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm deeply troubled by the contents of a letter I received from the Minister of Natural Resources regarding the state of the Lake Nipissing walleye fishery. In that letter, the minister did not rule out imposing restrictions on the sport fishing, nor did he rule out closure of the North Bay Fish Culture Station. The letter does affirm that Lake Nipissing's walleye population "is in a stressed state and requires management action."

It seems that this government is about to take the easy way out, though. They're poised to propose a shorter season, changes to the slot size, or other restrictions to sport fishing. They've made up their minds before looking at all the solutions for a situation that was foreseeable and preventable.

It's worth noting that the lake's cormorant population has been allowed to grow over the last decade. The birds now take 100,000 kilograms of fish, more than four times what the sport fishermen draw from Lake Nipissing. Please, let's not make any rash decisions until the cause of the stress on the fishery is fully determined.

We're also concerned that the minister's letter appears to all but rule out the restocking of the spawning-size walleye in the lake. Stakeholders I've met with and talked to say that restocking is the way to go, and it has scientifically been shown to be effective elsewhere. The ministry needs to revisit its stance on this.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Ontarians are absolutely outraged at the maltreatment of sea mammals at Marineland. And here's the situation, folks: We don't have any legislation; we don't have any licensing requirements; we don't have any government oversight, and this despite the fact that 83% of Ontarians have called for these for years and the

Ontario Environmental Commissioner has been urging the McGuinty government to do this for years.

It's not just about aquariums; it's also about roadside zoos. Did you know that zoos and aquariums need licences to keep chipmunks or raccoons but not for whales, dolphins, lions or elephants? This is absolutely outrageous, and Marineland is just the tip of the iceberg. Keeping an orca in a pool in Marineland is like keeping you or me in a bathtub. That's the reality. They're used to swimming 100 miles a day. They're not used to chlorine, and there are lots of examples of whales dying young and dolphins dying young. In fact, that's the reason BC has banned the importation of sea mammals. But Ontario does nothing.

The Canadian Council on Animal Care has come out very solidly and said that large, complicated creatures—cetaceans: whales, dolphins—cannot possibly have their needs properly met in an aquarium. So here's what we're calling for: Stop the abuse. Legislate and regulate now.

RÉCIPIENDAIRES DE LA MÉDAILLE DU JUBILÉ DE DIAMANT

M. Phil McNeely: Monsieur le Président, comme vous le savez, cette année marque les 60 ans de règne de Sa Majesté la reine Elizabeth II.

Une nouvelle médaille commémorative a été créée pour symboliser et honorer l'engagement dont elle a fait preuve toute sa vie envers ses responsabilités. Cette distinction rend hommage à ceux et celles qui ont fait des contributions importantes à l'Ontario et au Canada. Leurs actions représentent vraiment le legs de Sa Majesté.

Deux mille Ontariens et Ontariennes ont reçu ou recevront cette reconnaissance exceptionnelle au cours de l'année 2012. Je suis donc très heureux de souligner aujourd'hui, devant cette Chambre, le travail acharné, la passion et le dévouement qu'ont déployés 14 citoyens et citoyennes d'Ottawa—Orléans.

Je leur ai remis d'ailleurs la Médaille du jubilé de diamant le 25 juillet dernier, lors d'une cérémonie au Centre des arts Shenkman à Orléans. Alors, toutes mes félicitations à Elizabeth Allard, David Bertschi, Dan Biocchi, Frank Cauley, Syd Davie, Kimberley Fawcett, Nicole Fortier, Janise Johnson, Carl et Mary Lou Maisonneuve, Phyllis Mayers, Gilles Morin, Denis Perrault et Eric Smith.

1510

CARBON TAX

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm concerned about the recent comments made by the member for Ottawa—Orléans about imposing a needless carbon tax on hard-working Ontarians. To me, they further prove the Liberal government hasn't fully abandoned its reckless economic plan to increase the cost of everyday essentials like gas, groceries and hydro.

Ontarians want a serious plan to get our economy working again, not failed economic theories touted by Stéphane Dion, who led the federal Liberals to defeat in

2008 with the same carbon tax scheme now supported by a number of provincial Liberals.

The member for Ottawa—Orléans would like the Liberal government to forge ahead with a carbon tax—

Mr. Phil McNeely: Lies!

Mr. Michael Harris:—sooner rather than later, but he did acknowledge it can't because minority government status has put the Liberals in a "difficult position" to talk about the issue. That seems to be an admission that if the Liberals had a majority government, they would move quickly to impose a carbon tax. And now the Premier is trying to add another carbon tax supporter to the Liberal caucus.

It's no secret that one of the biggest proponents of a carbon tax happens to be running for the Liberal Party in the Kitchener—Waterloo by-election. In fact, Eric Davis is on record stating he believes a carbon tax would "greatly benefit Canada."

It's time for the Premier to be clear with Ontarians and disclose where he stands on the carbon tax issue today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member for Ottawa—Orléans to stand and withdraw his comment.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I withdraw, Speaker.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Reza Moridi: On August 11, 2012, the Azerbaijan province of Iran was hit with two earthquakes measured at 6.4 and 6.3 magnitude of scale. The cities of Ahar and Varzaqan were devastated by the earthquakes that lasted 11 long minutes. The epicentre of the quakes was almost 60 kilometres from the major city of Tabriz.

Official reports coming from Iran have reported 306 casualties and more than 3,000 injured victims. The unofficial figures indicated over 15,000 dead and injured.

This tragic event was worsened as many countries around the world, including Canada, did not come to the forefront as they have in similar situations to provide aid to the victims.

Furthermore, the Iranian regime refused the aid offered by other countries for over four days and kept the public at large in the dark with regard to the real impact of the quake by controlling the media, which placed the disaster at the lowest priority.

A more humanitarian path must be carved to support the victims of this earthquake, the same people that can be allies in bringing everlasting democracy and change to Iran.

I stand by all Ontarians in sending our condolences to the family of victims of this tragic earthquake and urge the governments of Canada and Ontario, and all Ontarians, to provide assistance to the survivors of this natural disaster.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to congratulate four farm families in Perth—Wellington who were recently

recognized for their innovation and contribution to Ontario's agri-food sector.

In 2009, Ralph and Paulette Coneybeare of Conlee Farms lost their barn and cows to a fire. From this tragedy, the Coneybeares started over. They came up with a simple but effective invention that helps cows be less stressed, give more milk and have fewer foot problems. Farmers worldwide use that system today.

Kim and Ben Dietrich, owners of Full of Beans in Bornholm, had a son who became sick after eating wheat products. This led them to make gluten-free baking mixes using Ontario bean flour. Their products are distributed in more than 50 stores and bakeries.

Hilton Soy Foods in Staffa have created a product called "Wow Butter," a soy-based alternative to peanut butter. Owner Scott Mahon developed the product to protect children from nut allergies.

Debbie and Ron Riddell of Denholme Farms in Milverton have used technology to develop an extremely efficient automated dairy facility. They recycle water to clean their cows and barn floors. They used natural ventilation when they built their barn. And no matter where they go, their video surveillance system will monitor their barn 24 hours a day.

Again, I congratulate these talented leaders in agriculture on receiving well-deserved recognition. They show yet again that Perth—Wellington is at the forefront of innovation in agriculture.

VISITOR

Ms. Dipika Damerla: On a point of order, Speaker, in order not to be a bad mother: I forgot to introduce my daughter, who's in the gallery: Sharmeila Cherla. Some of you may remember her. She was a page here back in February, but I think she looks a little bit different outside of her uniform.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): As the member knows, it's not a point of order, but welcome.

Introduction of bills? Is the member for Northumberland—Quinte West standing to introduce a bill?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Yes, I am, Speaker. I'm going to do the honourable thing and introduce a bill to the Legislature.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

INTER-PROVINCIAL IMPORTATION OF WINE AND BEER ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR L'IMPORTATION INTERPROVINCIALE DE VIN ET DE BIÈRE

Mr. Milligan moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 117, An Act respecting the importation of wine and beer from other provinces / Projet de loi 117, Loi concernant l'importation de vin et de bière provenant d'autres provinces.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Shall the motion be carried? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Does the member have a short statement?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Earlier this year, the federal government amended the legislation governing the inter-provincial sale of wine products between provinces. Now that there are no longer any federal prohibitions, each province will be required to amend its own legislation to make interprovincial trade legal.

This bill amends the Liquor Control Act to add a provision that permits individuals who are 19 years of age or older to import, or cause to be imported, wine into Ontario from another province if the wine is for their personal consumption and not for resale or other commercial use.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario's powers do not apply to wine imported by an individual in accordance with that provision. Wineries all across Ontario, including those next to my own riding in Prince Edward county, have indicated how the elimination of inter-provincial trade barriers will have a very positive impact on their sales.

Furthermore, it requires the government of Ontario to encourage the other provinces to implement or amend measures to allow for the free movement of wine within Canada.

A progress report must be tabled in the Legislative Assembly within three months after the bill comes into force and every six months thereafter.

The bill has similar provisions with respect to the importation of beer from other provinces, but those provisions will only apply if and when the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (Canada) authorizes the interprovincial importation of beer.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), the requirement for notice be waived for ballot items number 50 and 52.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, pursuant to standing order 6(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45

p.m. to 12 a.m. midnight tonight, on Wednesday, August 29, 2012.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Shall the motion carry? I heard a no.

All in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, please say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1521 to 1526.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion number 42. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Bisson, Gilles
Brotten, Laurel C.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duncan, Dwight
Fedeli, Victor

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Jackson, Rod
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Leone, Rob
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McKenna, Jane
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine

Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy
Piruzza, Teresa
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Thompson, Lisa M.
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakubski, John
Zimmer, David

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker. I heard you call "opposed."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I did not, but I will call it.

All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Gélinas, France
Marchese, Rosario

Prue, Michael
Scheln, Jonah
Singh, Jagmeet

Tabuns, Peter
Vanthof, John

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 61; the nays are eight.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Sydney.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): There are a lot of side discussions going on in the chamber, and I can't really hear what's going on. Can I ask those who are speaking in the chamber to take their discussions outside?

Petitions.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north's economy; and

"Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

"Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately."

I fully agree, sign my signature and give it to Sydney.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I have petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with these petitions. I sign them and pass them on to page Georgia.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas Street, at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

"Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

I support this petition and send it forward with Dia.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I'm signing this on behalf of the 1,000 or more dogs that have been euthanized because of breed-specific legislation, and I'm giving it to Sydney to be delivered.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here. It reads:

"Whereas the Liberal government has demonstrated that it simply does not understand the needs of rural Ontario and has unilaterally decided to prematurely cancel the extremely successful slots-at-racetracks program;

"Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates more revenue than all Ontario casinos combined and is the largest contributor to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.;

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry employs 60,000 Ontarians, including more than 31,000 full-time jobs and is the second-largest employer within the agricultural sector of the Ontario economy;

"Whereas the horse racing and breeding industry contributes \$2 billion into Ontario's economy, with 80% of that spent in rural communities;

"Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates over \$1.1 billion in profits annually to the government of Ontario and another \$345 million that is shared between racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry;

"Whereas local racetracks spend a considerable portion of their revenue on charitable causes in their community;

"Whereas the loss of the slots-at-racetracks program revenue will force host communities to raise local property taxes by as much as 2% to offset the lost funds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario must immediately recognize the damage that will be done to businesses, individuals and communities caused by its decision to end the slots and racetrack partnership. It must commit to reverse the decision immediately and commit to negotiating a fair, long-term income-sharing agreement between the OLG, racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry, to take effect at the end of the current partnership agreement."

I agree with this petition and I will affix my name to it.

1540

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 28, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to resume where I left off yesterday. As I said yesterday, I will be splitting my time with my colleague the leader of the NDP, Andrea Horwath.

When I wrapped up my remarks yesterday, I was talking about the legal risks that this bill poses to the people of Ontario: the potential for tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of dollars in damages.

The more people I talk to in the labour sector, the more people I talk to who are familiar with this area of law, the more they see this bill as an extraordinary and risky venture on the part of the government.

Speaker, as you are well aware—and I know you personally, so I know you are quite well aware—this government has brought forward this legislation rather than letting education workers and teachers sit down and work things through with their employers, the school boards. They've done that because they're facing a tough

time in two by-elections, and this government has an extraordinary quest which they are happy to have fuelled by the funds of the people of Ontario, an extraordinary quest to seek, to hold, a majority government.

When this bill was first brought forward as an idea by the Minister of Education, she made the argument consistently that we had to have it in place so that school could start right on the first day of September, right after Labour Day. The reality, Speaker, is that this bill is before us today because on September 6, a few days after school starts, there will be by-elections in Kitchener-Waterloo and Vaughan, and those by-elections will determine whether this government resumes what it sees as its entitlement, and that is majority government in Ontario, or if it will face an ongoing period of minority, where it will have to listen far more closely to the people of Ontario.

I have asked the Minister of Education before and I've posed this question to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association: Which school boards were facing closure on the first day of school because of a dispute with their employees? And the answer I got back from the public school boards' association was, "None. Not one." This government is focused on its own interests, on seats in the Legislature, far more than on kids in the classroom.

Let's go back a bit and look at some history here. The government sat down with all of the stakeholders in education in February. Speaker, as you well know, the province of Ontario is not the direct employer of the counsellors, of the custodians, of the office staff, of the teachers who look after our children, who educate them, who provide them with guidance, with knowledge—those employers typically negotiate with their employees starting a little after the beginning of the school year.

So this government sat down at the beginning of the year in February. Frankly, Speaker, when you talk to many people who were there, they found an unyielding, unco-operative, really "take it or leave it" approach on the part of the government that one could barely characterize—could not fairly characterize as negotiation, as discussion. It was an attempt to deal with things by simply saying, "This is what's going to happen. Sign on to it. Get used to it, because this is the way it's going to be." It was a "my way or the highway" kind of approach to talking to people that you work with, the people that the government refers to so often as its partners. Frankly, Speaker, treating your partners that way is one sure way to end a partnership.

A number of organizations walked away from that table knowing that, in the end, the provincial government was not their employer and that they weren't going to get movement on substantial issues—knowing at the same time that the province is in a difficult situation financially and that they would have to compromise, that they would have to move. But what they were looking for was mutual co-operation to actually build an agreement that both sides could live with, even if they weren't particularly happy.

As you're well aware, Speaker, the people who educate our children, who look after them in their hours

in our schools, felt that they were not respected. The Premier would talk to them through YouTube videos. He would not talk to them. They had huge problems getting through. Quite a few people left. A few organizations stayed at the table, operating in extremely difficult conditions. They concluded that they would come to some agreement with the government of Ontario, not because of great enthusiasm that I can detect but because their reading was that even though they weren't getting a good deal, it was a deal that they could live with. However, many others didn't believe that what was coming forward was something they could live with.

It's interesting that the government of Ontario, the Liberal government, decided that the whole idea of people talking and trying to find an agreement was something that stood in their way. And so, on July 25, the Globe and Mail reported that in a memo sent out the previous day by the Ministry of Education, school boards were told they had a month to settle with their employees—a month, after six months of negotiation with the province that had been largely fruitless. They had a month, and if they were not able to settle within a month, there was great potential that the government of Ontario was going to take them over.

That's not a way to treat your partner. That's not a way to treat an autonomous organization. It's not a way to treat a board of trustees that are elected by the people, given authority by the people to run those schools—a bad approach.

Now, one thing that is still unclear is what the government did next, because I have heard from numerous sources—and it would be useful for me and useful for everyone in this Legislature to know if it is true—that early in August, the government contacted boards of education and told them to start the legal process that would allow them, a month later—in fact, right at the beginning of the school year—to either lock out their employees or let their employees go on strike.

1550

Speaker, for government to say that its greatest interest is to look after students, and then, at the same time, talk to those trustees and say, "Do you know what? You have to act, and you have to act fast to be in a position where you can provoke a disruption of the school year. You have to do it now"—I'd like it if this Minister of Education would present in this House the memos that went out to the school boards at the beginning of August because if, in fact, those statements are true, that this government was telling the trustees to be in a position where they could disrupt the school year, then that puts in question everything we've been told about this government's commitment to making sure that education went on, went on continuously, went on for the benefit of students.

This government knew in mid-August that it was not going to get the cooperation that it wanted. It was not going to get people rolling over. It realized that it had set an impossible task to those boards of education, and so, around August 15, a draft of this bill was announced by

the Minister of Education. Again, we were told urgency was the order of the day because if we didn't act urgently, then we wouldn't be able to have the schools open the first day of school. But in fact, instead of calling the Legislature back in mid-August, it wasn't called back until August 27.

The government's whole approach, at every stage, says that putting students first is exactly contradictory to what's being done. If the government felt things were urgent, it could have called the House back sooner. If the government cared about the schools and the students, it would not have been telling school boards to set things in motion legally so that school could be disrupted on the first day.

If things were so urgent, Speaker, we could have debated this bill yesterday morning. We could have debated it this afternoon for debate this evening. The government has been playing all kinds of games with time, all kinds of games with the public, and there is a price for those games. There's a price in terms of the morale in our schools. There is a price in terms of the stress on the women and men who educate our children. That's a price that we are all going to face in the next few years, should the government be successful in ramming this bill through.

What does this bill do? It imposes a two-year restraint period, commencing the beginning of 2012—September 1, 2012—and contrary to agreements made with two of the associations unions representing teachers for a two-year agreement, it gives the government the ability to go into a third year, turning their backs on the people with whom they have an agreement. What sort of trust can you have in a government that does that?

Teachers, education workers, school psychologists, counsellors have until August 31 to negotiate a memo of understanding with the Ministry of Education. If a deal is not reached by this time, the range of options for shaping agreements becomes dramatically tighter. It gives local boards the power, until December 31, to negotiate agreements, frankly, Speaker, that can only vary a small amount from the government-imposed template. And then the Minister of Education, the cabinet, can simply say, "This is the agreement; live with it," or, "Don't live with it, but that's what it is. That's the agreement."

The legislation gives the province the power to force employees to pay back any money they receive ahead of the passage of this act, ahead of the settlement and the agreement.

It's interesting that the labour relations board and any other arbitrators are prohibited from either inquiring into or making decisions about the constitutionality of the act or whether the act is in conflict with the Human Rights Code. I have to say that this is pretty thorough. It makes sure that all kinds of legal structures and protections are stripped away. It didn't leave anything to chance. If there's a violation of the Human Rights Code, man, that's set aside. If there are problems with the law governing relations between employers and employees, well, those

protections are stripped away. If there's an arbitrator who may—who may—look at this, do an assessment and conclude that there are fundamental problems, that arbitrator can have no impact on the agreement.

The province can use the labour relations board to enforce their agreement, but employees can't use that same mechanism to protect themselves. Speaker, you know as well as I that if you're in a situation where the law can only be used to beat someone down and no one can use the law to protect themselves, you've diminished the law, you have diminished the authority of law, and you've diminished respect for the law because it has become one-sided. That's what is happening here.

Perhaps in the very short term this will be advantageous to the government, but in the long run, people will recognize that the authority and the integrity of the law has been undermined, eaten away, by this legislation.

This bill, in its entire shape, is contrary to the values that the people of this province hold dear to themselves: fairness, the rule of law. Those fundamental principles that have meant huge gains for the people of Ontario, that working people have used over the decades to try to improve their lives, are pushed aside, to our detriment as a society—not just to the detriment of the students, not just to the detriment of their teachers, not just to the detriment of those who work in the schools, but to every last person in this society.

There's no question that in dealing with the financial problems we face in this province and in trying to come to an agreement with those who teach and those who look after our children and those who work in our schools, negotiations would be tough on both sides, for the government knows that it has to look out for the interests of the whole society and that those who work for the public understand the constraints. Everyone needs to come to the table willing to be creative, to find areas where both sides can win and where, if the sides have to lose, they can lose with the least damage to themselves. That's the approach that was needed to make a success out of a very difficult situation. You have to roll up your sleeves and be ready to be creative, tough and willing to compromise. That isn't what we've got. What we've got is essentially a take-it-or-leave-it approach that damages the schools our children depend on.

The government failed to meaningfully consult with unions before introducing this legislation and has not allowed school boards and their employees sufficient time to work through their own collective agreements. Frankly, even if those agreements would have met the government's fiscal needs, even if they had had that opportunity—they may well have met all of the government's needs—but that process is pushed aside.

1600

The government approach has been counterproductive—making ultimatums, refusing to discuss parameters for bargaining, ruling out cost-saving suggestions from unions. It is this uncompromising attitude, this stance that has blocked the ability of all concerned to come to an agreement that all can live with. That's the problem.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask that the sidebars calm down a little bit. I'm having a little trouble hearing the person speaking. If you have a really hot conversation, I suggest you take it outside. Thanks.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the last few months I've had an opportunity to talk to members of teachers' unions, I've had a chance to talk to custodians, and I've had a chance to talk to support staff who have come in to see me in my office, who have phoned me and who have sent me emails. There wasn't a single person I talked to who thought, "Hey, it's party time. We can get whatever we want." No. They understood that they were going to have to move.

In the end, my sense is that the people who work for us, educating our children, looking after them, and the management, who have a responsibility for administering and running our schools, weren't that far apart, that a deal was possible. But again, because of the government's hard-line approach, common ground was left out, pushed aside, not explored. That will be of consequence to all of us.

As an example, one that shows up with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, they offered a two-year wage freeze, retirement incentives, cuts to administration costs, an employee-run benefit plan to bring about millions of dollars in savings—in other words, the flexibility and creativity that we all say we want to see. Their ideas were dismissed out of hand. That is no way to run an education system. That is no way to school our children, no way at all.

The bill, however, is successful in diverting attention from real education issues. The bill, first off, is driven by the need to win by-elections and, secondarily, is driven by cost-cutting considerations, not driven by the need to put students first and make sure that our children have the best education.

Speaker, as you are well aware, we are looking at recommendations to close 125 schools in Ontario, even though, according to People for Education, a number of schools could be saved if there was stronger government support for community use of schools.

Speaker, my guess is you found it in your riding, but I've certainly found it in my riding: There are demographic waves. In my riding—those who may be familiar with Greektown—right at the centre of it, at Danforth and Logan, there's a parkette there, and there's a school there called Frankland. When I moved into Riverdale in the early 1970s, the population was predominantly past the age when there were small children at home. We had people in their 50s, 60s and 70s, and that school, Frankland, was looking at being shut down. You go forward another 10 years, another 15 years, and that school was packed. Why? Seniors moved on, young families moved in, they had kids, and they had to send them to school. That happens time after time after time. Stable communities age, children move on, schools see a reduction in numbers, homes turn over, families come in with small children, and once again the schools are full.

We have a problem in that in the periods when the schools are partially empty, that space is expensive to look after. If the government was creative and decided, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to try and take things like child care centres, community health centres, day centres for the elderly, and section off the building and make sure that it's full but meeting community needs," then you would save buildings that could be used for decades to come.

Those school buildings are community centres across this province. In my riding, in Brampton, in Parkdale, there's no question that people see these as congregation points. Even more importantly, in small-town Ontario, rural Ontario, it's the place with the biggest meeting room that there is.

Blyth, Ontario, is losing its school. People who have been to that part of the world know that in winter, to get 100 or 50 kilometres down the road in a blizzard isn't going to happen. So the people of that community know that having the school in town means that children can walk. They don't have to risk being in a bus on a blizzard day.

Shutting down those schools means eating away at the core of communities, in rural Ontario, in urban Ontario. Those are the big issues that this government is leaving unaddressed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Point of order? It's my own guy. Don't you like my speech?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I believe we have unanimous consent to move the following motion:

I seek unanimous consent that the votes of Mrs. DiNovo, Mrs. Horwath and myself, Mr. Bisson, on government notice of motion number 42 be recorded in the votes and proceedings as nays.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Do we agree? Carried.

Continue. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to quote Annie Kidder, executive director of People for Education. She says, "If we supported real community schools, it would save some schools from closing, ensure that the one in five kids who need mental health support get that support in a timely fashion, and, in the end, it would save money." And you know what, Speaker? She's right. This government needs to be addressing that problem.

With this bill, it's catching our attention in the upper right-hand corner, while down on the left, they're taking away the supports that our communities need.

Talking about special needs: This government has failed to ensure access to support for students with special needs. In May, again, People for Education reported that 80% of elementary schools in eastern Ontario have caps on the number of students that can be assessed for special needs.

Let's face it: If you have a child who's having emotional difficulties, who's acting out, who needs

attention and support—a child who a teacher is trying to work things through with—if you can't get them even assessed, how are you going to get them support?

If there's a cap, you're a teacher and you go to the principal and say, "This child, this student, is in great difficulty." "That may be true," you're told, as a teacher. "That may be true, but you know what? There's a cap on assessments. You're going to have to wait." And in the meantime, that child isn't getting the support that it needs, and the children in that class are going to find that their teacher is distracted, that their teacher is having to deal with that problem, even in a partial way, for things to function. That's a substantial problem with the school system not being addressed.

1610

In fact, student-teacher ratios for special education have increased 50% since 2001. We hear all kinds of announcements about education, but for those children who need extra support, that support has been in decline—assessments capped so that even if you have a problem, you can't be put on the list to be taken care of. Then, when you are put in a situation for getting extra care, frankly, Speaker, the classes become larger and larger; the care is diluted.

There's inequality of opportunity. Schools in high-income areas fundraise five times as much as low-income schools and have more after-school programs. They have more enriched programming opportunities. One of the things that has made this society stand out from others is the equality of opportunity. I grew up in the east end of Hamilton. It was a fairly rough place when I was a kid, and I have to tell you the fact that there were publicly funded schools, that you could get into McMaster at a price that was relatively affordable, meant that many of the kids who I grew up with, sons and daughters of steelworkers, of people who worked in broom factories, who worked at General Electric, had an opportunity to get an education and go further in life than their parents had. If we don't deal with the inequality in our schools, if we make them two-track, if we ensure that people are locked in to a particular socio-economic situation, are locked out of opportunity, then this society will change in fundamental ways. The failure to address that problem on the part of this government undermines the stability of this society.

Schools with higher proportions of aboriginal students, even though they have more special-needs students, are less likely to have music teachers, teacher librarians or phys. ed. teachers. Almost every Toronto school has a library, but only about 10% of northern Ontario schools have libraries. Is it that people in northern Ontario shouldn't be allowed to read, that their needs are not as important as those of people who live in the south? Clearly not, although that's the way this government has structured things.

I want to just make one last note before I turn this opportunity over to Andrea Horwath, and that's talking about the state of equipment in schools, because I have a friend who's an occasional teacher who teaches music in

downtown Toronto. She would like to teach music. Her experience, though, is that every time an instrument breaks, that's it, it's over. No violins? No violins. No horns? No horns. We're getting down to the sticks. Her experience is that students want to learn, that they want to express themselves musically, but she doesn't have the budget to teach them because she can't replace equipment that wears out.

Speaker, others from my caucus, from the NDP, will be speaking about this issue today—it looks like until fairly late today—and we will talk about it in what I expect will be committee hearings, and then we will talk about it again in third reading. But I have to say to you, Speaker, that there's a fundamental failing on the part of this government. It's being covered up by its approach. It is using this act to try and win elections. It is using this act as a way of obscuring all the weaknesses in its approach to education.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I first want to commend my education critic from the riding of Toronto—Danforth for having done such a great job in describing the legislation and the impact that it's going to have on Ontarians.

I think that the biggest impact is going to come in the form of a huge bill that's going to be delivered to this province in a couple of years that's going to cost us upwards of probably \$800 million or more. I think that's the crux of the matter. This government is prepared to spend who knows how much? The sky is the limit when it comes to what they're prepared to spend to win some seats in by-elections, to gain their majority rule back in this province, notwithstanding the fact that the people of Ontario told them very clearly just a couple of months ago—well, maybe a year, almost, now—that they don't deserve a majority government.

I can tell you that, in talking to people in those ridings, they don't think the government deserves a majority. They know the government doesn't deserve a majority. Look what they did with a majority. They did the eHealth scandal with a majority. They did the Ornge scandal with a majority. They're in a situation where just last week they gave managers all kinds of bonuses—up to 98% of managers in the public service got bonuses, all the while the government is complaining that their fiscal house is not in order.

So, Speaker, it's very, very transparent and very, very obvious that this initiative, this legislation that is before us today, is not about kids in the classroom, it's not about making sure that parents and children are understanding what's going to be happening next week when school comes back, and it's not about education. It's not about any of those things. What it is about, unfortunately, is Liberals and their own self-interest, Liberals and their own desire to gain back power in this province. It's a very sad day, because we saw that they'll pay any amount; they'll pay any price. They have no regard whatsoever for the interests of the taxpayer, if that's how

we want to describe the citizens, the people of this province—no regard whatsoever.

We've seen it in the litany of scandals, and we saw it when it came to their own electoral interests in the general election, Speaker, when of course \$190 million was spent to try to save a couple of seats in the Mississauga area with the cancelling of that private power plant. It's very cynical. In fact, the Premier of the province actually said, "Oh, people understand that we have to spend tax dollars to do these things." In other words, he was justifying spending the tax dollars to get more Liberal seats. I think that is something that shows what level this government is prepared to stoop to—again, not for any reason other than their own political self-interest.

So it's more about the seats in this Legislature than it is about anything else, Speaker, and it's a sad situation, because once again we're going to have a situation, really, in this province where, maybe not today but a couple of years down the road, we're going to see a massive hit to the finances of this province simply because the Liberals thought they could buy themselves some by-elections. You know, it's not the way to properly govern a province. It's not the way to properly deal with the challenges we're facing.

I've got to say that I think the parties in this issue were willing to compromise. I mean, let's face it: They have been saying for some time that parents and students didn't need to worry; there wasn't going to be any disruption in the classroom come September. So there was no crisis and there is no rush to necessarily get this legislation through because, guess what? There's no problem. There's no uncertainty. There's no risk that there's going to be a disruption in classes in September, a short week away.

Not only that, Speaker, but the organizations that represent some of these folks are saying, "We're prepared to compromise. We know times are tough. We're prepared to take zeros. We've got no problem with that." Well, it looks to me like if you've got all of those things already in the bank, then there's a deal to be had. There's a solution to be worked out here. But this government was never interested in a solution because a solution simply wouldn't serve their political needs. That is the saddest commentary we could possibly have, a government that is so self-interested that they don't care what kind of damage they do to the books of this province or anything else in order to get their coveted majority.

I think that sometimes what politicians need to do more of is to actually stop talking and listen to people. Unfortunately, we haven't seen much of that from this government at all. In fact, what we've seen is the exact opposite. It started the day after the election took place. Instead of rolling up our sleeves and working to build an effective minority government, the McGuinty Liberals almost immediately set out to try to get their majority back—almost immediately. We saw what they did, right? They went to Mrs. Witmer and suggested that perhaps she would like a plum position as the head of the WSIB.

We've seen the lengths that they're willing to go to. It is very, very cynical.

As I said, they spent \$190 million cancelling that gas plant, and then of course they hid the information. They wouldn't let anybody know how much that cost until it was dragged out of them at committee, far, far after the election.

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They handed that responsibility of the WSIB over to Liz Witmer even though they actually disagreed with most of what her positions were when it came to the WSIB, when it came to the workers' compensation system.

So again, they're prepared to sell their principles, sell their values—I don't really know if they have principles or values actually, so I should probably retract that statement, but nonetheless—because, for them, forcing the by-election was the more important thing to do, because they thought that they could get that seat and win a de facto majority. Time and time again, when the people of this province need leadership that makes a difference for them, a difference that helps everyday families through the struggles that they've been facing after tough times, they face instead a Liberal government that is more focused on helping themselves, more focused on their own self-interest.

Now these two by-elections are being faced and the government is desperate to win them, desperate to win these by-elections. Voters really don't want to see that. They don't want to see another arrogant, out-of-touch majority government in Ontario. So what has happened is that they've decided they have to create a crisis. They have to make it look like there's some crisis happening to try to create fear, to try to create the fear of doing something radical for the people in those ridings, and they're doing it because they actually think that voters can be fooled.

Well, Speaker, I don't think voters can be fooled. I think the government is wrong. I think voters know very well what this cynical government is doing.

Just a couple of weeks ago—not a couple of weeks ago; actually, probably closer to two months now—New Democrat members worked with the Liberals to defeat a Conservative scheme that was pretty much like the one that we're debating today. At the time, the Liberals denounced the Conservative scheme; they denounced it as a simplistic scheme that was unconstitutional and would end up costing the public billions of dollars when it was eventually overruled by the courts.

Well, Speaker, fast forward a couple of months and here we are again. But I guess because the scheme, the reckless scheme, the unconstitutional scheme now has a Liberal brand on it, somehow the people are not supposed to be worried about what it's going to cost us? They're prepared, for their own political well-being, to kick this issue down the road for a couple of years until we find out that the Supreme Court overturns everything that they're doing today? And then what happens? Taxpayers are left on the hook. And so all the money that

they're pretending this is going to save—it's actually going to cost double, if not more, by the time this thing works itself out. It's a shameful, shameful grab for power, it's a disgraceful way of governing a province, and really, they should hang their heads in shame because they're trying to dupe the public or dupe the people in those ridings into thinking that there's a reason for it when there isn't. There's no reason whatsoever for it.

So, again, I don't think people are going to be fooled. I think that they know that they often pay the price for a government that is reckless and self-interested. They've paid the price time and again in Ontario. They're watching this train wreck come down the track, and they know they're going to have to pay the price one way or another with this particular reckless scheme. They also know, Speaker, that they can't afford it anymore. The people of this province cannot afford this government anymore. I think that they know that. I think the people in those two ridings know that.

I think everybody realized that, with the deficit, it was going to be tough times when it came to having the conversation about how we wrestle that deficit down. In fact, I talked to lots of different people during the election and before about how we were going to have to have some serious conversations about how we all work together to make that happen. But I also always said that the best way to make it happen is to have the conversation, is to actually work it out.

It looks to me very much like the parties are willing to compromise. It looks very much like there's a complete willingness to make sure not only that the school year is safe but that there is a way to help the government save money. In fact, I saw a number of proposals brought forward by a particular organization that set out quite a list of very interesting opportunities for that money-saving to happen. But instead of actually being willing to compromise, instead of actually being willing to have the conversation, the Liberals decided that they were more interested in picking a fight, picking a fight that nobody wanted, for their own political self-interests.

Speaker, I believe very much that the Liberal government has taken us down a very bad path here. It's a path that is going to cost us enormously—enormously—and I'm not talking in the long term; I'm talking within a couple of years. It's a path that is destructive and one that's financially and fiscally inappropriate. It's reckless and it's simply wrong.

I want to actually end off with a couple of quotes from some of our famous Liberal cabinet ministers and the Premier across the way. I'm going to start with one from the Premier himself because I think it's quite interesting. It's one from Mr. McGuinty. He was talking about the conversation that should happen in order to settle some of these impasses, the importance that working people should have a level playing field, the importance that working people should have the ability to organize and bargain freely, fairly and effectively: "There have been only a couple of occasions in the history of this province

when that has been taken away, and it has resulted in long-term problems." In fact, he goes on to say that relationships were poisoned and people ended up having a very, very difficult time re-establishing decent relationships.

He then said that he applauded those who stood up and said that the discussion route, the talking route, must be at the heart of whatever the solution is, that actually bargaining has to be at the heart of whatever the solution is. He went on to say that his leader led the way on that. I guess, now that he has become the leader, he doesn't need to lead the way anymore. It seems pretty backwards to me.

I also want to mention something that the Minister of Education said not too long ago, just several weeks ago: "We are at the table and we're having conversations with our partners, and for those who respect collective bargaining, that's the appropriate place to have those conversations." What the heck happened to that, Speaker? What the heck happened to that?

I've got to tell you: This government doesn't know anything other than what saves their own bacon. Every possible opportunity to try to make this impasse go away, to try to actually come to a positive conclusion through a respectful conversation and a hopeful and helpful dialogue, was thrown out the window, was set aside. It was set aside for a particular political reason, and that is so that the government could gain a couple of seats in the by-elections. Again, it's a cynical ploy and it's one that we do not support whatsoever.

The last quote is one from the finance minister, who said, "This party"—meaning the Liberals—"believes in free and collective bargaining." That's what the Premier used to believe, but he flipped and he flopped. Why? Because they're desperate. That's what Mr. Duncan said about the former Conservative government.

I have to say, really, who's talking out of both sides of their mouth? It's always the Liberals, and people have seen it time and time and time again. One day, they're in support of something; the next day, they're not in support of it. It's very, very clear that the only thing that matters in their figuring out whether they support something or they don't is if it helps them and if it's good for them. It's not about Ontario families and it's not about Ontario students and it's not about all of the other priorities that they should be focusing on right now—like the fact that there are 600,000 people still out of work in this province; like the fact that there is no investment happening in this province; like the fact that people can't make ends meet and there's a crisis in household budgets in this province; like the fact that people in Kitchener–Waterloo and many, many other parts of the province cannot get a family doctor to look after them; that people can't get home care for their loved ones; that people can't get long-term care, and they're expected to leave work to take care of ailing relatives.

The province is in a mess, and all this government cares about is its own political bacon. Shame on them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: While I may be an MPP, I do have a lot of very close friends who used to teach, who still teach or who are studying to teach. These negotiations are about as tough to bear in government as they are if you're an educator.

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This bill aims to keep teachers working, and to do so with fairness, in a contract that's sustainable, that's affordable and that's sensible. Four years ago, Ontario was running its third consecutive budget surplus. Times were better. The contract was a lot easier to negotiate. Just as all good times come to an end, so too do all bad times, and this challenge will end. I hope it ends, as the OECTA negotiations did, with a negotiated settlement.

This issue does not affect our government's commitment to education, and it certainly doesn't affect our respect for educators. Indeed, most of us who have served in government since 2003 have a direct connection with education, as teachers, as principals, as trustees or as board personnel.

The alternative to this bill is either an unaffordable status quo or it means stripping something else or borrowing or taxing in order to turn the proceeds over to these bargaining units. We cannot answer the sacrifices that the men and women in the private sector made during the past four years by neglecting our obligations in Ontario's education budget.

We'll still be there for our teachers. We look forward to the end of this collective bargaining process to restore the warmth in a relationship that I know, on this side of the House, we have all cherished and hope to see again. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues here have made some good points. The member from Mississauga—Streetsville says he has many friends in the teaching profession. Well, I am a teacher, or was, in my former profession, and I have many, many friends in the teaching profession.

One of the things I've heard from my colleagues in the profession about what the PC Party has presented, which was an across-the-board public sector wage freeze for two years: It was fair, it was equitable; they actually thought that was a fair and just approach in dealing with this.

But here we are in this mess now that this government has made. They've had two years to negotiate with the federation, but now, at the eleventh hour, we're bailing them out again. This Liberal ship is sinking.

To the member from Toronto—Danforth and the leader of the NDP, I'll point out that this government and the mismanagement of their finances is the real issue here. We wouldn't even be here if the Liberals and the NDP had supported my esteemed colleague Mr. Yurek's private member's bill back in May that would have solved all of this problem.

So here we are. We're in this mess because this government didn't listen. This government doesn't listen. All this government tends to do is bully its way through. It's forcing federations, teachers who really just want to be back in the classroom with their students—they don't want the politics, and that's what we're getting here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker. To our education critic, Mr. Tabuns, and our leader, Andrea Horwath, I appreciate the comments. I think they're bang on.

It's clear that what has been going on is that the government has been trying to figure out a way to create a ballot question that will assist them in the by-elections. That's what this thing has been all about. What better thing to do than try to create a crisis where none exists, to vilify teachers, to make it look as if the teachers are trying to do something they're not?

I heard the president of the OSSTF on television yesterday or the day before, saying, "We're not having a strike vote." I heard the head of ETFO and the head of OSSTF and others say, "We're prepared to have a wage freeze for two years." I've heard all of them, including the school boards, say, "We want to sit down and negotiate." Listen, I've negotiated on both sides of the table. It's hard work. You have to sit down and have the conversation, as Andrea Horwath has said. In this particular case, it seems there is a fair ability to find an agreement, because in fact there's already an indication on the part of the parties that they are willing to deal with the wage freeze for two years and some of the things the government was interested in.

So why are we doing all of this? I think it's a page out of John Snobelen's handbook for being Minister of Education: Create a crisis, and then once you get the crisis, you can get the objective you want. I think that my friend the Minister of Education across the way essentially, along with the Premier's office, has been creating this crisis. Why? Because they're trying to gain this to win seats in the by-elections, and I don't think the public's going to buy it. I think the public, at the end of the day, understands what's going on. I think they don't look well at a government who says, "I'm constantly trying to play this for my own political gain."

I would say to the government across the way: Hard work; that's what this is all about. People need to sit down and do the work that needs to be done to come to an agreement. I'm confident that we can get there, and I wish the government would come to that conclusion as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I just want to go back to a few points that have been raised, and I want to make it entirely clear that this party has been totally consistent that the preference is always a bargaining solution. No one has ever said that's not the case. Although we're getting into the 11th hour, that's still the preference. It

has always been the preference, and a bargaining solution, hands down, is the best solution. So any suggestion that our government does not prefer that is an incorrect suggestion.

I also want to go back to the budget. Not that long ago, after some deliberations and co-operation, we did pass a budget, and I want to remind people that a big part of that budget is focused on eliminating this deficit by 2017-18. It's ambitious. These are tough economic times. We are committed to eliminating the deficit. We inherited a terrible mess from the prior government. What is most important to remember in these discussions is that this deficit is, indeed, the biggest threat to education and health care.

Across-the-board increases don't work. Read Drummond. He says that; we know that. Salary and wages make up the biggest component of health care and education. Our commitment is to protecting the gains we've made in education and health care. That's absolutely the commitment.

We have to recognize that the biggest threat to those things is indeed the deficit. We need to continue to move forward with the gains we've made. We want to continue to build on the successes. We do not want to undo the quality things that have happened for our students in Ontario, the wonderful contributions of our teachers, the gains we've made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A two-minute response from the member from Toronto-Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Mississauga—Streetsville, Northumberland—Quinte West, Timmins—James Bay and Pickering—Scarborough East.

Speaker, you cannot figure this out, you cannot get through this maze, unless you understand that, in the end, this is all about the by-elections in Kitchener—Waterloo and Vaughan. Once you know that, everything else falls into place. That's what's happening.

Why has the House been brought back right at the end of summer with very little time to do what the government says it wants to do? Because there's a by-election going on. Why did the government not act earlier in the summer? Because the by-election wasn't in motion. They couldn't showcase their toughness to the people of Kitchener—Waterloo. Why is this government acting in a way so different from the way it's acted over a number of years? Because they think what they're doing sells at the ballot box. They're making this calculation that, in order to get a majority government, they can behave in this way and get those votes. That is the core of what we're dealing with. Everything else is understood, once you understand that.

Talk to reporters. I had an opportunity to talk to a number of them this morning. They look at this. They raise those questions all the time.

Speaker, in their quest for a majority, this government is risking sticking the people of Ontario with a bill for hundreds of millions of dollars, because this bill has a very good chance of being judged unconstitutional. This

bill could cost us money, will demoralize teachers and will undermine the education our students need, all because this Premier wants a majority—all because of that.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I rise today to speak in support of the Putting Students First Act. In doing so, I and this government are speaking up and standing up for Ontario's students, for Ontario's families, for Ontario's educators and for Ontario's taxpayers.

This proposed legislation is necessary to secure peace and stability in our schools. It's necessary to achieve the financial sustainability of our publicly funded education system. It's necessary to demonstrate that we, as elected MPPs, can work together in the best interests of Ontarians and get results when and where they are most needed.

Our government's recent outreach should give all Ontarians confidence that the majority of members here today understand our province's fiscal circumstances and have considered the personal circumstances of families across the province.

If passed, this legislation would ensure that collective agreements between unions and school boards reflect the province's fiscal reality while protecting Ontario's investments in our publicly funded education system, a system that ranks among the best in the world.

The Minister of Education has already spoken in great detail about the specifics of the proposed legislation, so it's my intention to use this time to shed light on other important results that have come from our difficult but determined discussions with our education partners during the past six months. In doing so, I will also speak about some of the compromises our government has made, in the spirit of making minority government work, to ensure that the proposed legislation has the necessary support of the House.

There are two things our government has heard repeatedly from teachers across the province: first, that hiring practices, specifically young teachers seeking long-term or permanent positions, are fraught with inconsistencies across school boards and rely too little on experience and too much on who you know; second, that teachers, people who are highly trained in assessing student needs, should be given a greater role in determining the selection and use of diagnostic assessment tools for their students based on informed, professional judgment. To do so, teachers tell us, is not to diminish the necessary oversight and expertise of principals and school boards, but rather to recognize that teachers dealing with students on a daily basis are well positioned and well trained to determine how best to assess student learning.

I'll speak to both fair hiring practices and diagnostic assessments in turn, but first I think it's important to speak on how these issues arose in labour discussions and were refined during more than 300 hours of negotiations with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.

As the Minister of Education outlined in her remarks to this House, we began discussions at the provincial discussion table six months ago with our education partners. These discussions, for those unions who showed leadership and stayed at the table, were difficult but constructive. They resulted in significant improvements to the government's initial position. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association should be commended for their hard work and their skill at the table. Through their perseverance and problem-solving, and the government's openness to their input and ideas, we reached a memorandum of understanding on July 5. That memorandum is a win for families, a win for taxpayers and a win for educators.

A key part of the memorandum, a document that was painstakingly negotiated in good faith, was the inclusion of language around fair hiring practices and diagnostic assessments. Current hiring practices vary from school board to school board. In some cases, this can result in significant challenges for qualified teachers who are looking to do what they do best: get into a classroom and help Ontario's students succeed. The fair hiring provisions in the OECTA memorandum provide for a standardized, consistent and transparent approach to hiring occasional teachers for long-term occasional and permanent positions.

With regard to diagnostic assessments, these are used to identify a student's needs, abilities and readiness to learn the knowledge and skills outlined in the curriculum. This information helps teachers determine where individual students are in their learning so that teachers can better personalize their instruction for a particular student's need.

Language in the OECTA memorandum was designed to give teachers greater autonomy in choosing appropriate assessment tools and in deciding how often assessments are needed, while continuing to respect the vital leadership of principals and school boards in making decisions on student supports. Similar language for both fair hiring and diagnostic assessments was included in the memorandum our government would later sign with l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO. It was, and remains, our government's intention to extend fair hiring and flexibility about the decisions regarding diagnostic assessment tools to all instructors in our four publicly funded systems.

But the language in the OECTA memorandum immediately came under attack from school boards and, in turn, from some members of this House. These attacks were fuelled by either misunderstanding or misinformation, or both. For example, self-interested parties claimed that fair hiring would force school boards to assign supply teachers based solely on seniority, regardless of the qualifications of the teacher. Not true. In fact, all boards in Ontario have processes for selecting and placing certified teachers on their occasional teacher rosters. These processes will not change.

The fair hiring provision in the memorandum focuses on the steps after the initial selection by the boards and

on the subsequent placement of teachers in long-term or permanent assignments. It outlines the process by which appropriate candidates for jobs will be interviewed and considered for those jobs.

In a nutshell, boards will have to give first consideration for hiring to teachers who are qualified for the position, taking into account the obligation to provide the best possible program and the safety and well-being of pupils, as well as the teacher's experience on the board's occasional teacher roster. That is in no way a requirement to blindly hire based on seniority. To be clear, many boards in our province do have clear and transparent processes in place, and I commend them for their leadership. But it's important to our young teachers that we have consistency when it comes to the hiring of teachers with public funds.

Regarding diagnostic assessment tools, it's been stated that much of the value of assessment comes from using the same assessment tool over several years to build a portrait that is clear enough to allow for effective, targeted intervention and board improvement planning. We don't disagree with that. However, while these types of assessments need to be maintained, we are looking for a better balance. The OECTA memorandum still requires that teachers conduct those assessments, but with assurance that these assessments inform the instruction of their students. No teacher will be permitted to opt out of using diagnostic assessment tools, but they will be given more flexibility to provide input on the selection and use of assessment tools in a manner that recognizes their in-depth understanding of the needs of their students.

The oversight and expertise of principals and school boards continues to be essential in efforts to support student achievement. Our government is simply ensuring that another qualified voice, the teacher's voice, is allowed to speak up on behalf of a student's best interest.

At their core, both fair hiring and teacher flexibility for diagnostic assessments are about student achievement and doing what's right to ensure that every pupil has an opportunity to reach their full potential. That should be the focus, not territorial rights. School boards and principals are vital partners in our student achievement agenda. These provisions respect their role and their expertise. Clarification about how diagnostic assessment tools are selected and used, and the establishment of fair hiring practices that are consistent across the province, will strengthen our education system. That's why we agreed to them, and that's why these improvements are still a priority for our government, just as they are for the many teachers who, over years of talking with us and in hundreds of hours in recent negotiations, made fair hiring and diagnostic assessment a clear priority for improvement.

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Our government announced weeks ago that we would be moving forward with a fair hiring regulation and a policy and program memorandum on diagnostic assessments. That will happen. But to make the ministry work and respond to concerns from some members in this

House, we made a revision to the Putting Students First Act before we introduced it in the House. We changed the original draft of the act to reflect that balanced diagnostic assessment and fair and transparent hiring practices will not be a required element for any other union or board that has not already signed an agreement. That means that our partners, OECTA and AEFO, who have signed memorandums will be required to have those specific terms included in local collective agreements, but other parties would not, unless they have signed a memorandum on or before August 31.

To be clear, this limitation would not affect the ability to make a regulation under the Education Act with respect to hiring practices, nor would it affect the minister's ability to issue a program and policy memorandum with respect to the use of diagnostic assessments of students. In fact, we still intend to do just that: introduce a fair hiring regulation under the Education Act that will cover all school boards in Ontario, and issue a policy direction regarding the use of diagnostic assessments. We will do so because it is in keeping with what has been our focus all along: finding ways to continue to improve our publicly funded education system while also finding savings that can help us address Ontario's most pressing concern, which is the provincial deficit.

Since 2003, our government has invested heavily in publicly funded education. We have given the sector, including teachers and staff, the resources they need and the recognition they've deserved. Our investments in education, made in the best interests of students and reflecting the strength of Ontario's economy at the time, have resulted in a world-class education system that is well equipped to manage a two-year pause in compensation gains. This pause, which is included in the already signed memorandums and is included in the proposed act, is strong and necessary action toward reining in our deficit in a responsible and a balanced manner.

Now it is on our shoulders, every member of this House, to do what is right and pass into law a bill that would do nothing less than stabilize our education system and our finances, not to mention the lives of everyone expecting school to start on September 4.

Our government did not make the decision to introduce legislation lightly, but times are also tough, and there's a need to take action when, after six full months of negotiations, we still have so far to go.

Some unions are content to let their contracts roll over, ensuring a significant number of teachers get a 5.5% wage increase and two million more bankable sick days. Some school boards are content with the status quo when it comes to things like fair and transparent hiring and balanced diagnostic assessments. But in 2012, the status quo is not a good enough reason to do nothing.

Our government does not accept the status quo. Some 300 hours of negotiations with OECTA produced an agreement that is fair, balanced and responsible for families, for teachers and for all taxpayers. It challenged the status quo and it delivered a superior, affordable,

sustainable result. We don't need the status quo. We have something better: the proposed Putting Students First Act.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much for that fine introduction, Speaker. It's so perfect.

I must say, for the member who just spoke—I'm sure he's feeling pretty dizzy right at the moment. It's probably a good thing that he sat down from all that spinning that he was doing during his discussion. There are far, far too many statements in that member's speech to address each and every one of them in two minutes, but I think we have to—first off, let's put some of the obvious out in front.

This is sheer political posturing on the part of this Liberal government. We saw it first-hand and clearly this morning, when there was an opportunity to debate this bill this morning at 9 a.m. What did the Liberal government do? They brought in a motion to speak about full-day kindergarten, a policy that has been adopted by this House, in legislation, and is being implemented now. This Liberal government has the gall to bring forward a motion to support it after it has been implemented. It's absolutely preposterous that the Liberals could actually think that they're being truthful and honest on this bill.

The member speaks of securing peace. Well, I guess he wasn't out in the yard, out on the front lawn yesterday with 4,000 or 5,000 teachers down here at Queen's Park. I guess his idea of securing peace is somewhat different than the teachers in Ontario.

The member was speaking about getting rid of the inconsistencies in hiring. I think, first and foremost, the Liberal Party and all its members should be looking to get rid of the inconsistencies in their own platform and in their own bill and start sticking to some principles and start doing honest, rightful things instead of this posturing and this facade that they've been foisting on the people of Ontario.

I will agree with the members from the third party: This bill has everything to do with September 6 and nothing to do with September 1 and the start of the school year. That was never in jeopardy. The only thing that's in jeopardy is this Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd like to add my voice to this debate as well. What I find very concerning and what I find very troubling is that the government is creating their own crisis. This is something that we read about in novels. In 1984, by George Orwell, it talks about governments creating a crisis and then solving the crisis and trying to take credit for solving it as a manner or as a fashion to gain popular support. That was fiction, and it's funny that sometimes fiction comes true in reality.

If we look at what's happening now, we're seeing—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Truth is stranger than fiction.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: There you go.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's the one you're looking for.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I lost it in my train of thought.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much to the member from Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And you don't get much of it from over there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would suggest that the tri-party dialogue goes through the Chair and not to each other. I feel left out, okay?

Continue.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We never want that, Mr. Speaker.

What's more troubling is that this is simply an attempt to distract from real issues that are going on in our education system and some real scandals and real crises that are going on in the government, namely Ornge, namely the fact that power plants have been cancelled in Oakville and Mississauga, and the cost to taxpayers. These are issues that we need to hear some accountability about. These are true crises, not the teaching issue, because, first and foremost, teachers have made it clear and support workers have made it clear that schools were never in jeopardy and the school year was never in jeopardy, so that there is absolutely no necessity for this legislation. It was not required, and it's simply an attempt to distract from real issues and a ploy to gain popular support, which will not be accepted by the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

1700

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair there and keeping order in the House, as usual.

I have two minutes to make some comments on the very eloquent rendition of Bill 115 by the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

In a few days, the kids are going back to school. We weren't so sure that the kids would be going to school in the next few days unless we introduced this bill. I think the members of this House know that two of the unions—one has already taken a vote to go on strike and the other one is holding votes until September 7.

Now, I think it's not only appropriate, the title of the bill, but it's more appropriate to know that the parents of all the children will be given the peace of mind that the kids will be going to school, that the schools will be open, that the teachers will be in the classrooms—and the teachers, Speaker, are the ones that we, together with the kids, want to do the job: the kids to be in school and the teachers to teach.

We love our teachers. There's no question about it, Speaker. This is not about the teachers. This is about putting kids first, and the rendition by the member from Mississauga—Streetsville has addressed so eloquently the benefits of this particular bill. So I think the House should be considering it very seriously, and say that it's

not the time to put this threat out there to our families, our parents, our students. They deserve that our teachers are given every opportunity to do what they do best, and that is to teach. So I congratulate the member, and I hope that the House will support the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I've only been a member of this House since October, and it's incredible how things get spun around, turned around, and everything else. It's just incredible how this is done. We've had a government that has been in trouble financially for a number of years. We also have a government that was given a minority government by the voters of this province, and here they are trying to win an election in K-W by trying to get people's minds off of what the real problem in this province is. The problem is: We don't have enough money to go around to pay for things—and that goes back to the last election, when a gas plant was cancelled in Mississauga, after a gas plant was cancelled in Oakville. We find out it's going to be \$190 million of taxpayers' money, this gas plant in Mississauga.

It's incredible how this government can pat themselves on the back and say they're doing a good job. The voters in my riding certainly didn't see that. They've also given a 98% raise to managers and executives in the public service. It's just incredible how this government works. This is all about political posturing. We know that. The public knows that. It's time for this government to get down to business and find some real ways to help with our deficit in this province. We are not going to make their targets in a couple of years because of the bungling that has been going on with this government. We are headed for a \$30-billion deficit, and unfortunately this government has a real issue seeing that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Mississauga—Streetsville has a two-minute reply.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, Bramalea—Gore—Malton, York West and Perth—Wellington.

To my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, it was two minutes of Conservative, rhetorical blah blah blah—enough said.

To my colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton, this is an issue that can be resolved by people of goodwill. Join us, I ask you—join us and let's get everyone back at the table, talking with one another, where we can actually do something. If I understood the intonations of the member's comments correctly, he thinks balancing the budget is a distraction. I hope that's not what he meant to say, but that is indeed what Hansard put on the record.

My colleague from York West—a great member—does grasp the gravity of this issue, and he shows how his background and years of experience in the House and in his community favour dialogue and negotiation over confrontation and sloganeering.

My colleague from Perth—Wellington said not a single word about the bill or about education at all. Enough said on that, too.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Boy, just in the nick of time, I finished with that text.

Today we're debating Bill 115, which I know the member from Mississauga—Streetsville erroneously referred to as something about students. There's nothing about students in the name of the bill. I forget the name of it, actually, because I don't have it in front of me, but it has nothing to do with students; it's about sending people back to work. It's about legislating people to work.

From the start, Tim Hudak and the PC caucus have said that we're not going to derail a school year or the start of a school year; we're going to do whatever is necessary—and I have our education critic here with me today, Lisa MacLeod, who has done a tremendous job representing our views on this issue—and we're going to ensure that students are in school for the start of the year next week. We made that commitment to the government.

Of course, they then, sillily—is “sillily” a word? I'm not seen sure, but it doesn't matter, because it was just silly. The Premier comes back and he says, “I'd like that in writing.” Can you imagine that? That's game number one. We'll get to the point here shortly, Speaker.

Then they tabled the legislation, and then they changed the name of the legislation. Then today, we get a silly motion in the morning when we could have been debating this legislation.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: No, we couldn't. We can't debate the same day.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Absolutely. The Minister of Education is chirping in there, but she knows that this House works on the basis of unanimous consent. We could have unanimously consented to speak to the bill in the morning and the afternoon. By unanimous consent, we could have done that. But, no, they would rather try to play the game of “smallitics,” as my friend from Nepean—Carleton called it today, which came from her roots down east. They call it smallitics when you're just playing games.

I've been here for a little while now, but every day I get another lesson about Liberal principles. I'm going to give you a little explanation about Liberal principles. One thing about Tim Hudak: Last November, he said, “An across-the-board public sector wage freeze affecting everyone. Whether you are a provincial public servant or municipal public servant, legislate a wage freeze”—principled, equitable, responsible.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Illegal.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, my. The Minister of Health is telling me what's illegal now. She should go study some of those files over at Ornge. You want to find something that's illegal—illegal, immoral, disgusting, degrading, awful. I tell you, go take a look at those files over at Ornge; we'll talk about illegal.

Everything that we've done can be defended on the basis of principle. We have stuck to them, they've been rock-solid, and we've been consistent on them. •

I'm going to tell you a little story about Liberal principles. Have you ever looked into the refrigerator, and oh, you've got some of this, and you've got some of that? Oh, there are some carrots there. There are some turnips. There are some cucumber—whatever—some squash. You decide, “I don't want to throw this stuff out; I'm going to make a little soup out of it.” So you take all that stuff that's stuck in the refrigerator that you don't want to throw away—it's still good food; shouldn't be wasted—and you make a soup out of it.

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There's no consistency of what's in the soup; it's whatever is in the fridge. A couple of weeks later, you go through the fridge again, and, “You know what? I'm going to have to make another pot of soup.” It's completely different from the one you made two weeks ago, but that soup could be called Liberal principle soup, because depending upon the situation, it could have anything in it, and depending upon the situation, it may in no way, shape or form resemble what was in the Liberal principle soup of the week before. So that's what we're dealing with here, because it is every little political game that they can play. Thank goodness our critic stood hard and our leader stood tough and they said, “You know, we need to see some changes.” So we got some changes with regard to the seniority and how that would affect the hiring of supply teachers within the school boards. The minister and the Premier made an agreement. They said, “Okay, we're going to do that. But we're only going to do that to the people that signed on after August 31.” So the people that have signed on already, which was really the partners of the government, OECA and then the French school board, are saying, “Oh, no. We're still going to have the union deciding who gets to supply teach.”

You talk about a principal: principle, “le”, and principal, “al.” We're saying that the right thing is to let the principal, “al”, decide who is going to be supply teaching, and on the basis of who should supply teach in my school if I was the principal. Let the principal make the decisions on who is best suited to teach, to supply those grades, whatever the requirements would be at that particular time. That's a great principle, “le”.

But the Liberals now, they say, “Well, no. That's only going to apply to the ones afterwards.” Again, they just blow like the wind. It's up and down like, you know—I was going to say something, but I didn't know if I could so I didn't say it, Speaker, because I know who's in the chair and I'm rather careful when there are certain deputies in the chair. So they're just all over the map on this.

And then today—this is just too rich. And there's a lot of anger out there, as you saw yesterday on the lawn, thousands of teachers. You saw the front page of the Toronto Sun this morning. Right on the front page, the headline on the front page just said, “Liar, liar.” That's what the headline on the front page of the Toronto Star said. And so obviously there's some anger out there.

So what does the Premier do to further confuse the situation? He added a little something else to the Liberal

principle soup. He makes a statement today that he's musing about—you see, because part of this agreement is that the teachers are going to lose some of the banking of the school days.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Sick days.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sick days; thank you very much. So the Premier now says he's musing about ending the bankable sick days for police and firefighters. However, he only says, "But that's for the municipalities to deal with." Because we want the municipalities to deal with the police and the fire, yet the biggest police force in the province happens to be the OPP, and he won't be dealing with that. I mean, this guy is unbelievable—or, to be more accurate, not believable. Anything he says has to be taken with a grain of salt.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Put some salt in that soup.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Health says, "Add some salt to the soup." Well, this week it may be salted; next week it may be not. It depends where the Liberal principles land that day.

So this is what we're trying to grapple with on this side of the House. And let me be clear: We have said from the start we're going to support the legislation. Why? Because it is the first time since last November, when Tim Hudak sat in the corner office—the corner office on the second floor that I hope and pray to God he will occupy after the next provincial election, for the sake of this province, for the sake of the people in this province. But he left the meeting in that corner office, currently occupied by Premier McGuinty, and for the first time since that meeting, we actually saw the possibility that that Premier—that Premier over there—may actually be starting to come around and accept that the condition, the fiscal mess that he put this province in, along with his friends, that there is the possibility that he might actually recognize that we're in a fiscal mess and that restraint at the wage level in the greater public service might be something that he wants to talk about.

So what did he do? Instead of doing the principled thing and saying to everybody out there, "Look, we're going to treat you equally"—in this House, we're equals; we have different roles and different responsibilities, and there are some things, for example, ministers of the crown cannot put forth a private member's bill and backbench MPPs can. We understand that. There are delineated responsibilities depending upon the office that we hold, but in this House, we are all equal. We have one vote, and that vote counts equally. But he says to the public service in the province of Ontario, "You are not equal. Today, I'm going to single out the teachers. I'm going to attack them, and I'm going to rip up the agreements that we have with them and we're going to impose a deal."

I understand, and we understand, that in times when you are on the edge of the fiscal abyss you have to take tough measures, but why does he do it in only the one instance? Because he wants to be in the news every day talking about how tough he's become. That's why he muses today that he's considering ending the practice of

bankable sick days for police and firefighters, because, you see, he's getting the news back from Kitchener-Waterloo and Vaughan that he's not selling as well as he'd like to. Premier McGuinty's lustre is growing a little bit dull. So he figures, "Okay, I've got to send out a new confusing story today. The Toronto Star is not even printing what I'm saying anymore, so let's throw something new out there today." Again, that is sort of the confusing environment surrounding the principles of the Liberal Party and the Premier.

Our position has been consistent all along. Don Drummond, the hand-picked economic guru of Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party—paid for by your tax dollars, by the way—

Mr. Robert Bailey: How much did he make a day, John?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Was it \$1,500 a day or \$1,800?

Interjection: Fifteen hundred.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Fifteen hundred a day.

Mr. Robert Bailey: That's good work, if you can get it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, it's good work, if you can get it, and, you know, some of the stuff he did was worth \$1,500 a day; he did some good work. I'll tell you one thing, he'd be able to figure out why there's a \$300-million hole in the numbers that the Liberals put out there, saying that this is a move to balance the budget. But the deal that they signed with OECTA, if it's spread across the entire teaching sector, will actually add \$300 million to the debt in this province—the debt that Premier McGuinty keeps going on and on and on and saying, as he said at AMO last week up in Ottawa, "The number one priority for this government must be to eliminate the deficit in the province of Ontario." He's going about it quite the way.

So, after the budget, as soon as we left this place here, the first thing we find out is they just signed a deal, \$190 million—let me say that again: \$190 million—to cancel the gas plant in Mississauga, to save Liberal seats. I don't know how many seats they saved, I think there was—somebody said it was something like \$43 million a seat.

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Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's 47.5.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What was it, there?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's 47.5.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's \$47.5 million a seat. I'd like to know what it was per vote. We need to do the math to see what it was per vote. You see, we have election financing laws in the province of Ontario. In my riding, the maximum amount I could have spent on the campaign would have been somewhere around about \$82,000 or something. I might be not exactly 100% accurate, Speaker, but it's in and around that amount. I don't have the most populous riding in the province. I have the best, but I don't have—what we lack in quantity, we make up for in quality up in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

I think that in election financing, a dollar and a few cents per voter is what you're allowed to spend—what is

it, \$1.07 or \$1.09, or something like that, per voter that you can spend. I wonder how much they spent per voter in all of those ridings in Mississauga to cancel that gas-powered plant.

But they didn't just cancel it; they waited till the darned thing was half-built and then they cancelled it. It's just unbelievable.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): My apologies, member. There's a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure we should be making accusations about Elections Ontario. I think—

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Let me finish, Mr. Speaker. The integrity of Elections Ontario, of course, is to make sure that they look after the operation of democracy in the province of Ontario, and I think we should be very cautious in impugning the integrity and talking about Elections Ontario. That has very little to do with Bill 115 here, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jagmeet Singh): Thank you very much. That's not a point of order.

Please continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I'm a little disappointed in the member from Peterborough, that he would rise on something like that, knowing that the gentleman sitting in the chair temporarily as the Speaker would not have the depth of knowledge of the standing orders to be able to rule him out of order immediately. But I'll rule him out of order myself. Shame on him.

Anyway, we've got this money that was spent, your taxpayers' money, and here's the best part of it, Speaker: They admitted that it was a completely political decision. There was no logical reason. If you decided to start building the thing a few months before, on what basis would, all of a sudden—the skies changed and everything else, the world completely reversed itself, and now we don't need to build the plant? No.

The Minister of Energy, at estimates—the committee is holding him in contempt, by the way; they're holding him in contempt. They're changing his name from Minister Bentley to Minister Contemptly. They held him in contempt for refusing to release the details on the deal. You would think that a government that—Speaker, you weren't here in 2003, but I remember that first throne speech.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Peterborough has a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to hear you rule on standing order 23, section (b), where it clearly says: "Directs his or her speech to matters other than ... the question under discussion...." Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector: I

would say it's a bit of a stretch to be talking about the Minister of Energy and gas and power plants. I'm not sure how that relates to Bill 115.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member for his point of order, and I will certainly take it under consideration. But I think the final decision will be up to me if I think he's stepped over the line.

Continue, but I am watching.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, I'll get some added time, because I've got some very important points to make here, and the member from Peterborough has been robbing my clock.

Anyway, what it comes down to is, it is a matter of principle. Again, we've decided, for the sake of the children—they wanted to whimsically call the bill Putting Students First, but I think some of their own advisers changed their minds on that, because it was just a bit of a stretch. But we've decided to do the right thing—put students first—and support the government on this bill, not because the bill is right—it's like a piece of Swiss cheese; there are holes in it all over the place—and we're not doing it to support their principles, because they don't have any. But we are doing it to try to ensure that the students will be in school next week when the school year starts.

But I want to ask them this question: If you believe, rightfully so, that you can freeze the wages of teachers across this province, then why in the name of all that is holy can you not freeze the wages of every public sector worker in this province? That's the question I put to you. That's the question you have not answered. You can do it legally. It is constitutionally proper. It has been shown. It's time for you guys to stand up and start to adopt Conservative principles.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Gosh, I've been here for about 10 months, and every bill that has been presented in this House I've listened to very closely. I've listened to both parties' points of view. This bill, it's kind of hard to—it's like a sales job. That's the impression I'm getting: that this government really wants to sell this bill as if they did their best to have talks with the teachers, the talks came to a stone wall and they have had no choice but to impose legislation. I'm not buying that sales job this time around.

Some of the bills that I've seen come through—I have seen some of the good points that have been discussed. Then we've put our input and also the party opposite, the opposition, put their input, and a lot of the time it comes back to the House and it's actually a better bill than it started as because everybody has a voice in that bill and they've come to an agreement.

The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke talked about principles. All of us here have principles, but sometimes you do have to compromise on some of those principles to come to a resolution that is fair for everyone and so we can all come to an agreement.

I think that what has happened here—from what I've picked up on and listened to, you're really trying to sell us and the public a bill of goods. During this by-election in Kitchener–Waterloo, I don't think the voters are going to buy what you're selling.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I truly enjoyed the concoction—presentation—by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke there. I know he went into the fridge, but I hope all the vegetables that he put in that soup were all Ontario produce. I would call it perhaps a wonderful cocktail, with some whisky and maybe some grappa, because listening to the member is always wonderful and entertaining. I have to say, Speaker, with all due respect, that, right or wrong, and of course we don't always agree on everything, he puts his heart into what he says, even when he's wrong. But given the fact—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's the nicest insult I've ever heard.

Mr. Mario Sergio: No, no, I truly mean it, Speaker, with all due respect. The fact is, we welcome his comments. We welcome the PC caucus support. I know they have some concerns, but at the end I can see that they understand the importance of seeing this particular piece of legislation going forward.

I have to say to the member and to the House that the minister has been very, very busy since early this year, since February—over six months of negotiations. Some of the boards have seen reason and accepted the memorandum of agreement as of July this year; others are still pending. But it is important that we get our teachers, for whom we have so much respect, and we get the kids back into the classroom come September. I think the reason that the bill is here today is because of that, and I hope we can have the support of the House. I thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

1730

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. It's a pleasure to once again be part of this debate. I want to thank my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his 20 minutes of this debate, talking about our concerns.

Let's be quite frank, Speaker. We did indicate last week, through our leader, Tim Hudak, that we would bail the Liberals out on this particular piece of legislation, not because we agree with its entirety, but because we believe it starts to get us on that road to what we have been saying for over a year now: a public sector wage freeze throughout the broader public service.

My colleague mentioned that this is really a labour bill and not really about students. I can say that it is consistent with our view that the basis and the parameters of this legislation really have more to do with a fiscal hole in the government's financial plans than they do with anything else.

It goes without saying that we appreciate Ontario's teachers, our principals and our school boards, which

brings me to our two very big concerns with this legislation. One is, we believe it produces a \$300-million hole in their fiscal plan. It's going to cost about \$450 million because teachers will still be able to move up the grid, with offsets of only about \$150 million. That's why we want the Auditor General to review their numbers, because we still have 4,000 collective agreements outstanding in the province of Ontario throughout the broader public service.

The second thing we have a problem with is sub-clauses 19(1)(e)(i) and (ii). We are concerned that they strip and usurp the ability of school boards and principals to make locally based decisions in their own school communities on hiring supply teachers and also diagnostics testing. That's unacceptable to us, and that's why we're going to be pushing for a committee meeting in order to amend this legislation at clause-by-clause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I partly have to agree with the member from Nipissing—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Renfrew? Thank you. I've got to partially agree, and the part I will agree on is, where I think we are in sync is that it's pretty clear what the Liberals are up to here. The government wants to create a crisis in order to show that they're responding to some kind of a crisis so that they'll be seen as being tough and responding to the crisis so that they can manipulate the voters in order to try to win some by-elections. I think simply this is what this is about.

What's clear, and as we know from the public record, is that teachers have offered a two-year wage freeze as they went to the bargaining table. How often have you seen a union, prior to negotiations—I remember this only happening once, where CUPE inside workers or outside workers for the city of Toronto essentially said, "We'll take a pay freeze," going into bargaining. You don't see that very often. The reason they did that is, I think, the teachers understand, "There's a tough time out there. There's the need to balance the books." They're prepared to do their part. That was the first part.

The second thing is that none of the teachers have ever gotten up and said that they want to have a strike, and neither have any of the school boards said that they want to lock the teachers out. So where's the crisis? We have two parties who want to negotiate, and you have two parties who want to have hard discussions that have to happen to get to an agreement. What you've got in the middle is the government saying, "No; we're going to contrive a crisis in order to drive an issue that, hopefully, will help us win some by-elections in Waterloo and in Vaughan." I think that's a pretty cynical play.

I think we need to respect that, when it comes to these kinds of decisions, the local employer, being the school boards, and the teachers, through their unions and associations, have to have the opportunity to sit down and have the discussions and do the hard work that has to be done in order to get to an agreement, and I think there's an agreement to be had.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members from London–Fanshawe, York West, my colleague from Nepean–Carleton and also from Timmins–James Bay.

I want to thank the member from York West for his kind personal comments. We don't hear that that often in this House, and I do appreciate that.

To my colleague from Timmins–James Bay, I share a lot of his concerns about the motivation and the reasons why we're here. A few weeks ago, the Premier was saying that we had to come back and pass this legislation by September 1. It had to be passed by September 1. It is highly unlikely that we're passing this legislation before September 1. So we know that wasn't the fact. We know that was an invented situation.

We now know that, regardless of what we do here in this House, we could have made it retroactive. Whatever decision is made at the end of the day, if the bill is passed, we could make the terms of that bill and the actions denoted by that bill retroactive. So you do have to ask yourself, was this somewhat of a manufactured situation in order to draw some attention to, you know, Dalton McGuinty, dragon slayer, riding into Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan as a white knight of some kind?

Because all summer long I've said, "There's only one thing that the Liberals are thinking about right now. It's clear they don't care about the deficit. It's clear they don't care about the debt. It's clear they don't care about jobs and the economy. They care only about power." And right now, the only thing they're worried about is the by-elections in Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan. Once they get by those—we'll have to see what the composition of the House is—we may find out a little bit more about what the next Liberal plan is for the people of Ontario. I hope it's a better one than we're hearing today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I want to do is paint a picture for the public. I want to paint a picture of what's really going on here, and I want to clarify a phrase that I used earlier.

What's going on in Ontario, and particularly what's going on with this legislation, is nothing more than an overt attempt to distract the public and to use and manipulate an opportunity to create the perception that the government is taking decisive action.

The problem is this: My honourable colleague drew attention to the fact that this was about making sure that the school year starts on time, and that there was some indication that unions had presented the appearance of looking to strike come the start of the school year. Let's clarify that. First and foremost, there are a number of steps that need to be taken to have a legal strike. Those steps have not been taken by any union in Ontario. There has been an indication of perhaps a protest, there's been an indication of perhaps the willingness of some of the members that they would in some circumstances strike, but very, very clearly, no union in the entire province of Ontario has said that they would stop the school year

from commencing. No union, or school board, for that matter, has indicated that there would be any disruption of classes whatsoever. That's a statement I make without any hesitation, and anyone in this chamber can confirm that there is absolutely no risk to the disruption of the school year.

Our classrooms will commence, our school year will commence as usual, so why the necessity of this bill? Well, let's look at some of the circumstances surrounding the bill.

We were called back early from the summer break, but this bill was not debated until today during evening session. There were three full days that we could have started the debate on this bill; it did not begin.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: You can't do it on the first day.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Fair enough. Perhaps we couldn't have done it on the first day, but—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There appears to be about six sidebars going on, and I'm having trouble hearing. So could we cut it back a little bit so the Speaker can at least have some—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Turn up the volume.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need any 10-cent comments, thank you.

Continue, and hopefully it will get a little quieter.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: So that's one thing when you look at the strategy about when the House is called back, the timing of it, coincidentally right in the middle of the by-election. It could have been called back earlier. There was a strategic decision not to call back the House earlier. Why not? We need to think about these questions. Why? Why was it specifically called during the by-election?

Why was this legislation presented when there was absolutely no risk of the classrooms being disrupted? There was absolutely no risk. No member on this side of the House can tell me with any confidence that the classroom would have been disrupted come the start of the school day. Absolutely no one can say that.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough–Pickering East.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Now, some members like to draw attention to—and one of my honourable colleagues discussed the fact that this is about the budget, that this is about balancing the budget and this is an issue regarding the fact that there is a cost associated. Fair enough. We are in certain economic difficulties, fiscal difficulties, and we need to approach those with some measure, some thoughtfulness and some seriousness. However, it is very clear in case law in Ontario—and in Canada, more importantly—that the type of legislation that's being presented has been found to be unconstitutional.

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This very government has indicated very clearly that a similar program or similar type of approach was taken in BC with public sector workers. The public sector workers were legislated to have a wage freeze, and there were some serious repercussions. I can't fathom how anyone

on the government side can with a straight face think that this legislated wage freeze—and it's not just a wage freeze, in fact; this is a much deeper bill than just a wage freeze—won't be challenged in court. There will be significant costs associated with that challenge, and there is certainly the chance that this bill will be defeated and determined to be unconstitutional. There's absolutely no guarantee that this bill will be deemed, for sure, 100% constitutional.

Now, if this bill has the chance of being unconstitutional, and there is some case law precedent to support that—now, every case is not identical, but there are certainly strong arguments to say that this is very similar to the case in BC; it doesn't have to be identical—how can the government members then say with a straight face that this will be saving money for Ontario? How can they say that? There is the spectre of billions of dollars—not just millions of dollars. There is a spectre of billions of dollars of risk here. It's most certainly a risk.

Again, it speaks to the fact that this bill is a guise. It is a form of distraction. It is not about putting students first whatsoever. It's not about Ontario families. It's not about ensuring our education system is strong. It is politics of distraction, and it is a method and a strategy to gain popular support. But the trouble is that it's not working, and the trouble is that people are seeing through it, and if people don't see through it, we will do our best to ensure people see the true colours of this bill.

What we also have to look at is, again, the timing. Let's look at the timing of this bill, just to understand the circumstances here. There was no surprise. There wasn't an unprecedented or unpredictable event that occurred here. Everybody knew that the contracts were set to end at the end of the month. That was common knowledge. This was known for a great deal of time. Why is it that these steps were taken right at the 11th hour? It begs the question, why? What's the strategy behind that? Obviously it's not the most sensible approach. Obviously it's not the most rational approach. Why wait till the 11th hour, if this was truly the purpose of the bill, to ram it through right at the end? There was considerable time to negotiate with teachers, with support workers, but strategically, the government chose not to do that and chose to present a bill at the 11th hour.

What's remarkable is that we have so many members of the government party who spoke out against a very similar bill that was proposed by the Conservatives, and they spoke out with clarity, with fervour, that this was absolutely unacceptable. They cited case law. They cited how it's an irrational and reckless approach. But they're doing the very same thing. It was so easy for us to research this. It is somewhat troubling and concerning that the government party would bring up a bill when they themselves criticized something quite similar. They criticized—and didn't just say, "Oh, there's a problem with it," but, "We're adamant that the proposed bill of public sector wage freezes was a wrong approach, was an incorrect approach."

They're doing the very same thing. Let's look at some of the comments that were made. Our education minister,

who seems upset with some of the comments that are made, indicated, "The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled the unilateral PC Party wage scheme unconstitutional. If tried here in Ontario, it would be overturned by the courts and cost taxpayers billions of dollars"—the Liberal education minister. This is from the CBC News, July 25, 2012. And just a month later, we're looking at something quite similar.

I'm very careful with my language. I'm not saying that it's exactly the same. For sure, it's not exactly the same, but it's quite similar. It's a wage freeze. It actually goes beyond that and talks about what the unions are able to do in terms of whether they can strike or not strike. It looks at the ways they organize themselves. There is a very deep bill here that goes into quite a number of issues beyond simply freezing wages. If the government party was so concerned with the Conservatives' bill, then why are they presenting something so similar that goes beyond what the Conservatives wanted in terms of its scope, in terms of its impact on teachers?

Again, it's not about education; it's not about teachers. It's about the by-election. We've seen the track record of the Liberal Party on this issue, on the idea of purchasing votes, the idea of spending money to gain seats. It's no surprise, but it's the facts.

There are two examples that we've talked about and need to be addressed very clearly: the power plants at both Mississauga and Oakville. They were cancelled, again at the 11th hour, on the eve of an election. If it was truly an attempt to be democratic, if it was truly an attempt to work with the constituents or the citizens or the residents of that area, then why weren't the citizens of that area consulted previously? Why was it that after protest after protest, when the polling indicated that there were seats at risk, the government then took the step to cancel the power plants, costing hundreds of millions of dollars to the taxpayers of Ontario? We know that at least the publicly disclosed cost of the Mississauga gas plant is \$190 million. We don't know yet the cost of the Oakville power plant.

These are examples of spending taxpayers' money, precious resources, to gain seats, and it looks like we're seeing the very same thing here, where we have the risk of court battles. We have the risk of a courtroom settlement which could cost us not millions, not hundreds of millions, but there is a risk of billions of dollars being wasted here in the long run, simply to have the perception of being decisive.

Even the Minister of Finance, when referencing the Conservative Party's bill to freeze public sector wages, indicated that Tim Hudak needs "to reference the BC Supreme Court decision and a number of others that have constrained governments.... Mr. Drummond, an adviser we brought on, and others have advised and will advise the Leader of the Opposition and others that wage freezes tend not to work, either in the short or long term."

What do we have now? We have a wage freeze, and it's not going to work in the short term or in the long term.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's a lot more than that.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's exactly that. Actually, it's a lot more than just a wage freeze, which makes it that much more troubling.

A member opposite said that I would go on record that my position on this—that the bill is simply a point of distraction. His contention was that I was saying that balancing the budget was a matter of distraction. No. Balancing the budget is very important, but to balance the budget takes a measured and rational approach. It doesn't take 11th-hour legislation that's haphazard and has the potential of being overturned and costing millions, if not billions, of dollars.

I talked about this previously. I want to make it very clear: This is very truly a fabricated and a manufactured crisis. There was no risk to our classrooms. School would continue, and there is absolutely no need for this legislation. In fact, the unions and the school boards have at least come to this agreement: Across the boards, many of the unions have already accepted the idea of a zero wage increase, a freeze on their wages. They were able to voluntarily come to that point. The issue is that this legislation goes beyond that. The negotiations went beyond that.

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What issues is this bill distracting us from? We look at the mismanagement of our precious funds. We are being distracted from the fact that we've seen time and time again that in Ornge there was a number of clear red flags and warning signs that were missed, that were overlooked, that were ignored. Ignoring these warning signs cost millions of dollars to taxpayers again. If we're talking about balancing the budget, if we're talking about being careful with our precious resources, then it's of paramount importance that we as a government, as representatives, ensure that there are proper oversight mechanisms in place, that we don't see wasteful spending.

We also see that there are substantial issues in our classrooms. We see schools being closed, and one of my colleagues talked about this, that there are cycles when it comes to schools. There are cycles in populations. There are cycles in terms of children who attend a school. There are time periods where families grow up and mature, and populations or attendees of schools decrease. It's not the right action to then close that school, only to have to rebuild or reopen that school when the population increases. That's not a thoughtful approach, and that's what we're seeing. We're seeing community hubs, centres of communities, small communities, rural communities, urban, suburban—schools act as a hub for the community. If schools act as a hub to the community, shutting them down is a devastating blow to communities. It's not the appropriate approach.

That's an area where we can look at using our resources more effectively. We can use schools in a creative way. We can use them to balance other concerns, including child care, seniors' centres, community health centres. This is a creative approach, a strategy to consolidate our resources, to not waste what we've already

built, and that would reflect a more rational and thoughtful approach to the fiscal problems we have.

I had mentioned previously today George Orwell and his famous novel 1984, where the author was describing a fictitious scenario where the government created problems. It created conflicts that weren't really there. They created problems, and then they solved those very problems to appease the populace, to make people feel that the government was taking care of them. It turned out that all the conflicts were manufactured and fabricated.

What I had tried to say before is, truth is much stranger than fiction. Truth is stranger than fiction, because what we're seeing is very much of the same. We're seeing a fabricated problem, a fabricated crisis, and then we're trying to solve that. The government's trying to solve that fabricated crisis and gain credit for it: "Look, there was a problem here," which wasn't actually there. "Here's our problem: The school year's at risk; our students are at risk. We're going to save them. We're going to stop that from happening." There's absolutely no evidence, though; there's no proof that there is actually a problem. There's no proof that the schools won't open on time. There's no proof that students and teachers won't show up.

In fact, we know that this week teachers have gone to their classrooms, are setting up as usual, business as usual, that they had been talking about their classroom preparation last week. There was no talk of, "Let's organize for a strike. Let's shut down the schools." There was absolutely no talk of that. So absent any proof, absent any evidence, the government has tried to present this picture that, "We're saving the school year. We're going to make sure that classrooms will open on time; that this legislation will protect our education system." It's not doing that. If this bill doesn't pass, or was never presented, the school year would have started as usual. So I say that truth is much stranger than fiction.

What do we need to do? We need to look at sitting down at the bargaining table and negotiating with our teachers, with our support workers. We need to look at proper government oversight to ensure that our precious dollars are spent wisely. We need to look at a more rational and thoughtful approach, as opposed to cynical politics and posturing, as opposed to creating divisive policies. We need to be looking at ways to create positive change that is meaningful and that doesn't distract the populace but engages them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Being close to 6 o'clock, there is not time to get in the two-minuters.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will be recessing the House until a quarter to seven this evening. Thank you.

*The House recessed from 1756 to 1845.
Evening meeting reported in volume B.*

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**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Inter-Provincial Importation of Wine and Beer Act,
2012, Bill 117, Mr. Milligan / Loi de 2012 sur
l'importation interprovinciale de vin et de bière,
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of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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Wednesday 29 August 2012

Mercredi 29 août 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 August 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 août 2012

The House recessed from 1756 to 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 28, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate. The member from Scarborough East-Pickering.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Pickering-Scarborough East. Thank you, Speaker. It's getting better all the time. There's a song called It's Getting Better All the Time.

I would like to start off this part of the debate talking a bit about the progress we made in the last eight or nine years and why this is important to Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act. I want to speak about the importance of teachers and the work they've done in partnership with us to create safe and vibrant places for our children to learn. I want to talk about classrooms, places where our teachers guide and develop our students to help them reach their absolute full potential. These students are our future leaders, teachers, and drivers of business and the economy. They are our future—our future grandchildren and so forth.

It is so important to reflect a bit on the progress that has been made and why we're here today and how we're going to move forward together. Ontario public schools are now ranked in the top 10 in the world. We restored peace and stability to classrooms in the past eight years, and we want to continue that.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A little order, please.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Smaller class sizes in the early grades: It's very important, Speaker, and 97% of primary classes have 23 or fewer students. We want to continue with that. We want to preserve that.

High test scores: They are up 14%, with more students meeting or beating the provincial standard. The number of students meeting the provincial standard has gone from a low 54% to 68% in just eight years. It's fantastic.

More students are also staying in school and graduating. The dropout rate is down, with 81% of students graduating from high school. That's up 13% from the prior government.

Full-day kindergarten: It's the first of its kind, Speaker, giving Ontario's four- and five-year-olds the best possible start. The program will be available to all students in all schools in 2014, helping kids learn. It can also help families manage their day and save money in child care costs. But more importantly, full-day kindergarten contributes to better learning. We all know that education is the key to jobs in our future in the province, and full-day kindergarten is going to help with that.

We have more and better schools, Speaker, with 550 new schools being built since 2003 and 23,000 schools repaired or upgraded. That's fantastic. I see that in my riding all the time; I see it in other people's ridings. You go around and you see the sign that says, "We are repairing and investing in this school." I see it everywhere in Ontario; it's fantastic.

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We've also, Speaker, focused on making schools safe. That is always job one of the schools. Of course, it's education, but as a former chair of a school community council for eight years, as someone who still sits on the special ed advisory committee at the school board where I live, safety is always job one. It is important to keep schools safe, and we addressed and helped implement the new legislation to address bullying, to keep it safe in schools and make reporting of violent incidents mandatory.

We also need to acknowledge the strong schools in rural parts of Ontario, Speaker. Our schools are indeed the heart of communities, and that can't be more important than it is in rural Ontario. So we've increased funding for rural schools by over 37%.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That's fantastic.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is. It is fantastic. Looking to the future of our students, we've made accessibility to and affordability of university more of a reality, by capping tuition, tripling the number of student grants and helping out with easier rules for student loans. We have our 30% tuition reduction grant, and we've created 200,000 new spaces in colleges, universities and apprenticeships to make sure there's an affordable spot for everyone.

Speaker, those are just a few of the highlights I wanted to mention that speak to the progress we've made with our teachers. They're key to the learning, they've been instrumental to this progress that we've made, and we

want to continue to make further progress. We want to keep the low class sizes. We want to keep the prep time for teachers. We want to keep the current holidays for teachers. Nothing in this bill that we're talking about, Bill 115, takes away from any of that.

What all this means, this progress we've made and where we're going, is that more students are indeed graduating, improving job opportunities and self-esteem. We want Ontario students to compete with the best and the brightest from around the world, and we feel that we can continue on this path in partnership with our teachers, with parents and with our students to make sure that progress continues.

I want to speak to a couple of provisions in Bill 115 that I think there's some misunderstanding about or perhaps some controversy about. Some members opposite have talked to this in a negative way, but I'm grateful to have the opportunity to bring some clarity to those. One of them is around the proposed sick leave provisions and what has been incorporated into some of the agreements to date.

It's hard to accept change, and when elements of one's total compensation package are introduced, it can be a bit unsettling. I think we understand that shifting to a new kind of sick plan is a significant change for some of the teachers, and it requires, I think, some education and good communication on the part of everybody: the school boards, the unions and the government, of course, itself. I think, unfortunately, that there's a lot of misunderstanding about what this new sick plan is about, that somehow there won't be any kind of safety net for teachers who get ill and injured. We know, Speaker, that it's really important that teachers have a good sick plan. Let's face it, we've all sent our kids to school sometimes less than 100% well. Teachers tend to pick up more bugs and germs, so it's very important that we have a robust sick plan, short-term and long-term, for teachers.

So within Bill 115 the restructured short-term sick plan would include up to 10 sick days at 100%. That exceeds the six days that we see in other sectors, and I think that's in recognition for the great work that teachers do, for the need for them to be on performance every day, for the reality that they can pick up bugs. I think most people are getting the 10-day part. But the other part is that the plan will also include partial pay for up to 120 days for more serious illness. So what this means, Speaker, is that this sick plan would be more in line with progressive short-term and long-term disability plans, and it's there—it's absolutely there—for teachers who are ill and injured. Some people said, "I don't take my sick days because I'm going to bank them." That is a behaviour; that is a pattern. I think there's lots of work to do to communicate what this plan is all about. The sick plan is there for teachers to use when they need it, and that's very important because we want our teachers to stay healthy. We want our teachers to enjoy a long and prosperous career in the profession they have chosen.

Previously, also, teachers had to use their sick days for maternity leave or serious illness. Again, that's not in

keeping with modern and progressive sick plans. Younger teachers who didn't have banked sick days were not supported and had to use sick days to go on maternity leave, so that created a particular problem or barrier for young people. The new sick plan will benefit younger teachers by providing income protection for serious illness and provide improved maternity leave provisions. That's important. We don't want younger teachers to feel disadvantaged. If the unfortunate situation happens where they become ill or injured, we want them to have a plan that's going to be there for them when they need it most.

I think it's important that we look at the whole thing—the sick plan—in the context of the total compensation plan. That's a really important thing to do when we're looking at provisions for employees, whether it's teachers or any other sector. As I mentioned earlier, of course it's preferable that we negotiate these provisions. And there's still a very small window of time to do so—a very small window of time.

I hope I've shed some light on that provision.

I also want to talk a bit more about younger teachers and what this bill means to them. I'm proud of the steps we've taken to help get young teachers into the schools and to stay in school. The McGuinty government's support for Ontario's young teachers has been shown and demonstrated clearly in the labour discussions, the OECTA MOU and this legislation we're talking about here this evening. We are introducing fair hiring practices to the education sector. There are teachers who have concluded teachers' college who have been supply teaching and on occasional teaching lists for some time and are not sure what the process is to be hired on a permanent basis. There's certainly a sense that you have to be in the know or you have to know someone to get on on a permanent basis.

The MOU sets out fair hiring rules that will bring transparency and accountability for teacher hiring processes and make them consistent across the province. I have a sister and I have friends who are teachers, and it is frustrating for them when they want to move from one school board to another and, guess what? The rules are different. Too many of the rules are different. So this is a good example where we're making it consistent and transparent from one board to the other.

It is also important to mention that management will still make the ultimate decision about who they hire. The administration at a school: They are the people in charge—the principal, vice-principal and so forth. But under this legislation, of course, the role comes with the responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood by all.

We also recognize the impact on young teachers of retired teachers who return as substitutes. We've worked tirelessly with the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. As of this September, retired teachers will be limited to a maximum of 50 teaching days per year—down from 95. This opens up supply days and classrooms for young professionals. After all, if you get your undergrad degree and you go on to teachers' college, you want to pursue

your chosen trade. We don't want to create barriers for teachers in this regard. We want them to be able to pursue their chosen professions. We absolutely respect and value the relationship with teachers; absolutely.

Mr. Mario Sergio: We love the teachers. It's the right thing to do.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It's the right thing to do.

As the start of school year approaches, we do have an obligation, Speaker. We have an obligation to assure Ontario parents that school will not only start in September but that it will be uninterrupted by labour disputes.

1900

That is why we're introducing this legislation, and that's why we're asking all MPPs to stand up, protect our students and our education system and put it on a sustainable financial footing for the future. Nothing is more important than protecting the gains we've made in education and health care, and if we don't manage the deficit, if we don't manage our costs closely, those things are in jeopardy.

This legislation focuses on having as many agreements as possible being negotiated before any other steps are taken. That's what everybody wants, Speaker. That's what everyone has been working hard towards. However, if they don't sign collective agreements that are consistent with OECTA's MOU or have such an agreement by December 31—not next week but by December 31—the proposed legislation would allow the imposition of agreements. But again, we've created some space, some time to make those agreements happen. We recognize that bargaining often happens in September. So there's a runway there, Speaker, for those agreements to come into place by December 31.

Like agreements for the last eight years, strikes or lockouts would not be permitted during the term of an agreement. So that's not different. Although we expect that classes will start as scheduled in September and we're all very encouraged to hear signs that that indeed will happen, without the passage of the Putting Students First Act there's no guarantee that school will continue uninterrupted.

I hope this has been helpful in terms of highlighting some of the background and context about the last eight or nine years and how it is so important that we preserve the gains we've made.

Speaker, may I share the balance of my time with another member, or should I declare that earlier?

Interjections.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I apologize to my wonderful colleague from Mississauga East–Cooksville, who has kindly agreed to share the time with me, so I'll turn it over to her. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Tracy. You did an admirable job, and I'll try to finish off.

Speaker, I rise today to defend, along with my caucus, the Putting Students First bill. I think in any debate, facts are important, so I'm going to get to the facts.

The fact is, we are here because after six months of trying to negotiate and of consultations, we have no agreement with some of the teachers' federations. What this means is that, come August 31, in the absence of a negotiated settlement, teachers will get a pay raise. What this is really about is fairness. This is not about a by-election. This is not about politics. Any politicization of this is being done by the opposition. This is essentially about fairness because we don't want a situation where some federations run the clock just in order to get a raise while other federations and unions have negotiated with us in good faith. It's also about the fact that we can't afford for automatic pay increases to take place. That's what this bill is about. This bill is about putting students first so that the money that we have—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I know it's late and we're a little rambunctious, but I can't even hear her. So I would appreciate it if we cut it down to a dull roar. If not, the poor Deputy Speaker will have to do something.

Continue.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, this is about being able to afford and make sure that our students continue to get a world-class education. By the way, I just want to share that we've just had some breaking news that says that our graduation rates have gone up, as well as our EQAO test results, which have gone up by 16%. So this just goes to show that we are on the right track. This is about putting students first.

I also want to very briefly talk about the fact that some members have brought up the issue that schools are going to begin on time. Well, what we want to make sure is that they continue, because it's not just about September 5. What about in October? What about in November? What about December? Because we know that some federations have strike dates set; they have been scheduled. So this is about making sure not just about schools starting on time but also making sure that they continue so that nobody loses an academic year.

I also want to address the whole issue of constitutionality that has been raised at times. The comparison has been made to British Columbia. I believe the Minister of Education has very, very eloquently addressed why you cannot make this comparison. That's because in BC the government gave 20 minutes' notice to the unions that they were changing the collective agreements. As a consequence, they were subject to a Supreme Court ruling which found that they did not respect the constitutionally protected right to a process of consultation and consideration in good faith.

Contrast this with six months of this government tirelessly trying to negotiate. The fact that we have been able to negotiate in good faith with some federations is proof that it can be done. There is still time to negotiate. We don't have to legislate; there is still time to negotiate.

I ask the federations in question to come forward, and we can still negotiate. If not, failing that, I ask all members of the House to do the honourable thing: Put students first. It's not just about school starting on time; it's about making sure that in October and November and December and February, schools continue.

Thank you so much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Before I get into questions and comments, I have a small announcement.

I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Bisson assumes ballot item number 52 and Mr. Schein assumes ballot item number 79.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's always a pleasure to comment on the member from Mississauga—I'm not sure which one in Mississauga it is; I don't have my glasses on. She's a lovely, lovely new member here, and she's such a sweetheart. She speaks very quietly in this House, which is something that I'm maybe not quite used to.

While I listened intently to what she had to say, I was concerned about whether or not she was just reading the notes that she has been given in that office across the hall here.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I speak my mind.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know she says she speaks her mind, and I trust her on that. But perhaps you have to take another look at some of the reading material that they're giving you, because those folks in that office over there are not above twisting the situation and maybe even bending the facts, maybe even manufacturing an issue. I'm being very careful how I say this, Speaker.

Anyway, we are debating this, of course, in the evening time. Sometimes in the evening time people become less attentive to what is being said. But I was listening very, very closely. I want to say to the member from Mississauga, just remember this: fairness, equality. Think about that when you're talking about a wage freeze. How about this: a wage freeze treating everyone the same all across the public sector, giving each and every employee the same order, that wages are frozen until we can get the mess that Dalton McGuinty made in order?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?
1910

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the members from Pickering–Scarborough East and Mississauga East–Cooksville for their speech or their comments on Bill 115. We heard a lot of statistics and we heard a lot of boasting about the gains we've made in education. That's all good to hear. We certainly want to make sure that we're moving in a positive direction when it comes to students, when it comes to education. But they didn't fill in the gaps, so maybe what they don't want people to understand or know, and what they forgot, was that there have been some things that they conveniently didn't portray.

Just last week, I was reading about the performance bonuses.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Well, the gains that we've made in education—the government has made some gains, but they've also made mistakes: the eHealth scandal; and 98% of public sector CEOs received a performance bonus. I just want to give the amount of that bonus, because when we're talking about saving money and putting things in the right places so that everyone benefits, this one particular eHealth manager got a bonus of \$81,000 last year. I have to say, he did the right thing: He paid it back.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order. The member from Guelph. The member from Renfrew.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The other thing that this government forgets to tell us is that they're not quite being 100% upfront on why we're here today. I think we're here today because they have a political topic in mind that they want to accomplish. What they want to accomplish is to win the K-W seat, and they're creating this crisis so that voters will think they are coming in to save the day. I hope voters don't buy it and they see through what this government is doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: Speaker, I'm delighted to point out the two members who have spoken on the bill, particularly the members from Pickering–Scarborough East and Mississauga East–Cooksville. They have punctualized in detail the core importance of Bill 115.

Imagine you are a parent and it's Sunday evening and you have two kids sitting in the back of the car and you're stuck on Highway 69 or 11 or 400 and the radio goes on, and, "My goodness. Six months into this situation and we still don't have a deal, and we've got to go home and make plans to get the kids into school? What is going on here?" So this is a real situation; it's not a fabricated case, Speaker.

I think it's important that we deal with the matters, with the content, of Bill 115. I think both members have very eloquently expressed the fact that the minister has been, since February, negotiating this deal. In September, the kids have got to go to school. The parents have to know that they can go to work with peace of mind that the kids will go into school and there is no strike.

There is no fabrication of any sort. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we have spoken to in this House. If we cannot pay importance to this, if we cannot pay the importance required to this piece of legislation, it means we do not have the respect that we should for our teachers, the parents and the kids.

I think it's important that we realize that we are at the 11th hour, and parents want to know what this government is doing and what this House is doing. I think we have to commend both members for alluding to the core of the bill, and I hope that the members of the House will understand that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob Leone: I find it pretty interesting to listen to the comments from the member for York West just there. I have to say that the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville was also talking about how this had nothing to do with the by-election. I find that pretty humorous, Mr. Speaker. She used the excuse that they've been negotiating for six months, and this has to be the reason why this has nothing to do with the by-election.

Who calls the by-elections in the province of Ontario? It's the Premier. To suggest that this was only coincidental is absolutely false. The Premier said that he would not call a by-election in the summer. September 6, to me, is the summer. He starts a by-election by breaking a promise to the people of Kitchener–Waterloo, and at the 11th hour he calls us all back to discuss this bill, a bill to put kids first.

I know that this side of the House wants to put kids first. I know that that side of the House wants to put themselves first. That's their only interest here. They want to put themselves first because all they care about—every decision that they've made has to be made because they want to keep the power that they have. They have no other interest but to acquire power, to keep power.

So what we're going to do in this House, Mr. Speaker, is to bail that party out—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, well, well, it appears we're quite feisty. Some members aren't in their seats and are commenting. Other members are standing up out of their seats and commenting. We seem to be getting into a position where we might lose control, but we won't, because the Deputy Speaker will bring down the hammer soon. So let's try to get along and let's move it smoothly. I want to get through this two hours, too, and get out of here. So let's have a little co-operation. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Rob Leone: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All I want to say is that given the events that have happened here, we have nothing but to conclude that the only reason we're here today is because of the by-elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough East–Pickering has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. Pickering–Scarborough East, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It says Scarborough East–Pickering on here, so you might want to talk to the people who make this.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. I will. I will.

Interjection.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Perhaps it's the French version, as my colleague says. Thank you, Speaker.

First of all, I want to thank and acknowledge all the members who have contributed to this debate. My colleague from Mississauga East–Cooksville, thank you for

your very important comments on the importance of the timelines that we're facing. And the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the member from London–Fanshawe—I really appreciate her comments about how important it is that we recognize the gains we've made and that we do need to move forward. We are in a minority government and we do need to move forward. And, of course, my learned colleague to my left, the member from York West, and his pearls of wisdom, and finally the member from Cambridge.

I just want to say, though, Speaker, reflecting on the comments today, throughout the day, that not all but many members opposite seem very focused on talking about by-elections and gas plants and other issues, which makes me wonder, why aren't they talking and working with us on the bill to keep kids in school? Why are they not putting students first? The reality, Speaker, is that by-elections happen. They have to be called. The government has to do that when members resign. If you're in the position of being government, you'll experience that as well.

We are here to talk about students and putting them first and continuing to work co-operatively with all the partners: the teachers, the school boards, the unions, the parents, the students themselves. That's what this is about. That's what these debates should be focusing on, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Barrie.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you, Speaker. I just want to welcome everybody back, even though it's a couple of weeks early and a couple of hours late.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: You have a nice tan.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you.

I think we could agree we're all here today for one reason, really: nine years of reckless overspending by the current government. It's put Ontario into an epic, record-breaking financial hole. Today I want to discuss what happens when you hand the keys for our system over to Liberals and the unions, the importance of students and teachers returning to the classroom on time, and the implication of the Putting Students First legislation.

Speaker, I will interrupt myself and just mention that I'm sharing my time with my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Which one?

Mr. Rod Jackson: Huron–Bruce.

If this Premier had more money, he'd spend more money. But now even he realizes that the public sector contracts are totally out of control and can no longer be sustainable. It was this government that let it get out of control—this very government. Now we've to get them out of it.

So here we are, debating legislation that will result in a partial public sector wage freeze. A partial public sector wage freeze isn't nearly enough to remedy almost a decade of careless overspending, but it's a start; as our leader says, half a loaf. The reality that the money has totally run out is slowly setting in, and our caucus and our leader will continue to push for a public sector wage

freeze right across the board. Indeed, I don't think only teachers need to be singled out here. Last week, the Canadian Press discovered that a pay-for-performance scheme had handed out \$36 million in bonuses to public sector managers. This means that nearly every public sector manager has been receiving bonuses of up to 12% of their salaries—and here's the kicker—just for showing up. Not for merit; just for showing up. This only leads to one inference: the Premier thinks public sector managers' bonuses are more important than education, and that's why we're here today only discussing teacher contracts, not the broader spectrum, because somewhere along the line, the Liberals have decided that managers and others in the public service deserve more compensation than our teachers.

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But at least we're starting somewhere. Thousands of Ontarians not in a lucky public sector family are doing much, much worse. I can point to my own riding, in Barrie, where our unemployment rate for a city our size is among the highest in the country. Worse looks like this: 600,000 Ontarians out of work; or an unemployment rate that has been below the national average for years; or two credit rating downgrades under the Liberals, most notably right after the finance minister's last budget plan; or worse may look like receiving handouts from the rest of Canada to supplement poor financial performance, such as \$3 billion in equalization payments; or the deficit that is three times the size of the rest of our provinces in Canada combined. So, worse than a partial salary freeze is the reality that is faced by everyone who is not insulated by the cozy public sector.

One such person is a constituent in my own riding. She came out to help on my campaign, and over a few weeks, she opened up about what it was like for her to live under this government that increases spending and taxes like there's no tomorrow. This lady told me the story of what financial management looks like to her. She said in her own words that she's got three jars. One is for her rent; one is for her electricity; and another is for her food. When one runs out, she's got to go into the next one, and do without. She's got to do without paying her rent or without food for a day, just so that she can survive. This woman has a job but she can barely afford to keep herself in her own house. And you know what? She can't tax anybody to get more. She can't even borrow money to get more. She only takes what she needs to live. You cannot squeeze blood from a stone. You cannot squeeze blood from Monica. She will not give you any more; she has no more to give.

Essentially this Premier is notorious for taxes and overspending. His spending is the worst in Canada. As a result, Ontario will balance its budget—if the planets align and the best we can hope for—in three years. Three years after every other province. The same provinces that suffered under the same recession, the same provinces we led into the recession, we are going to follow out of the recession. The same provinces we led in Confederation, we're now following.

Threatened by classroom chaos, the government has finally agreed to at least a partial freeze for teachers. After months of pushing by our caucus and by our leader, almost every single day in this House, it's a crack in your armour and the light is finally shining through, and we're going to press for more—a public sector wage freeze across the board.

In the meantime, we want our kids back in school. We want them back for the very first day of school. They shouldn't have to pay the price for this government's inability to negotiate an agreement. The work our teachers do and the effect they have on the lives of our students is incredible and lasting. I'm personally grateful for the quality of our teachers.

I had many teachers who impacted my life in elementary school and high school, and although it was some time ago now, a couple of them just by name: Maurice Cooke, Richard B. Wright—who turned out to be a Governor General's Award-winning author—and Colin Brezicki.

I'm now proud to say that my children, going into grade 4 and grade 6, have great teachers too. Those who have helped them with their science, when they realize that they need a little bit more—on their own time—helping my daughter to be challenged. My son had a kindergarten teacher who realized his love for music and took his own time to teach him how to enjoy music more and how to get more involved in music. For that reason, my son, who is now 11, loves music.

I'm no stranger to how important teachers have been in my life personally and the lives of my children. I'm also grateful for all the other employees who keep the system running year in and year out.

We're not here today in any way to devalue or suggest that the work done by our education system is insufficient or unsatisfactory. I have a great example right off to my left, my colleague from Northumberland—Quinte West. We're here today because our government has landed us in an epic financial mess. There's no choice but to act. Our caucus wants to see a wage freeze that treats every public sector profession equally and in accordance with the realities we are facing economically. We're pushing for the public sector as a whole to join us MPPs and do their part to restore Ontario's economy.

On September 1, 2012, there was supposed to be a 5.5% wage increase scheduled. Simply put, there's no more money. Again, you can't squeeze blood from a stone. This act imposes a restraint period that will commence in September and be extended via regulation, with a clause that allows it to be retroactive, I might add. This partial wage freeze is a step in the right direction after months of our caucus pushing for bringing public sector wages into line with economic realities. It's not quite a true wage freeze; 40% of teachers—45,000 of them to be exact—who have not yet topped out with their salaries will continue to move up their pay grid at a potential cumulative cost of \$450 million, which is why we want an auditor's report on it. Essentially, the act may be perceived as a partial pay freeze in two ways: because

45,000 teachers are still receiving a pay increase and, in the grand scheme of things, because only teachers are being targeted for this wage freeze.

We have also requested changes to the legislation to give teachers' unions control over supply teachers, hiring and student testing. Instead, this should be changed to restore our school boards' and principals' ability to hire the best possible staff and ensure proper assessments are done. Our party is committed to bringing forward amendments to make this legislation better, and we will continue to fight for a fair, reasonable, across-the-board approach—a legislated wage freeze. In the end, this legislation is only really a small part of fixing the financial mess this government has gotten our province into.

Finally, I concur with my colleague, the education critic, that our caucus views this legislation as recognition by this Liberal government that they are in a deep financial hole and that they will not be able to continue investing in education if they continue on the trajectory of a \$30-billion deficit. There is no more money. For the first time, we are thrilled that the Premier is taking the notion of a legislated wage freeze seriously and taking up our ideas.

Our caucus has been clear that we want students and teachers back in the classroom at the start of the scheduled school year. They shouldn't be the ones who pay for the mess this government has gotten us into over the past decade with reckless, runaway spending.

Thank you, Speaker, and I will now pass my time over to my colleague from Huron–Bruce.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Huron–Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to stand here this evening and join my esteemed colleague from Barrie and our education critic from Nepean–Carleton on this very important issue, especially when this is a time when enrolment is decreasing literally by the hundreds of thousands yet, all the while, spending continues to climb. It's interesting; when we have a Minister of Education who has seemingly wrestled union friends to the ceiling of their salary grids, we need to take a look at how this is being conducted. We can't afford this reckless spending any longer.

I've been paying close attention to this issue both here in Toronto and back home in my riding of Huron–Bruce. In today's climate, it takes a special, dedicated person to be a teacher. I first want to thank the administrators and support staff who work in our education system. They do a great job, regardless of whether it's in junior kindergarten or in classes right through to grade 12.

But the bottom line to all of this is that we're only here tonight because this Dalton McGuinty government, for the past nine years, has mismanaged Ontario's fiscal situation. He has given handouts, allowed scandals like Ornge and eHealth to prevail, and he's opened up his seat-saver program and cancelled the Mississauga power plant, costing taxpayers \$190 million. He's cancelled the Oakville power plant for a cost unknown to taxpayers as

the Minister of Energy won't reveal it, even though he's been called to do it.

Mr. Michael Harris: Contemptly.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Contemptly; yes, that's correct. They've cancelled offshore wind programs, and are now being sued for \$2.25 billion.

This reckless spending is impacting what we value most: education and health care and quality of life for all Ontarians.

If the Premier had done a better job of managing the economy from the get-go, stopped appeasing special interest groups and had an actual plan to keep public sector wages and spending under control, we wouldn't be here. Five thousand teachers would not have felt it necessary to take to the lawns of Queen's Park yesterday. The only one to blame here is the Premier, for his poor management and inability to make the tough decisions.

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My leader, Tim Hudak, is willing to make the tough decisions, just like he has agreed to bail your government out of your spending disaster. PC leader Tim Hudak has been very clear that he does not want to derail a school year. In fact, the Ontario PC caucus would appreciate no disturbances whatsoever, so that kids can be in the classroom and we can begin to implement somewhat of a wage freeze to get Ontario back on track.

The bottom line is, we had two choices: allow a 5.5% increase when the province can't afford it; or stop the nonsense, stop the pay increase for a portion of the public sector, get kids in the classroom and keep working towards a broader public sector wage freeze. It's the right thing to do.

This bill is the first recognition that we've seen by the Ontario Liberal Party that their spending is out of control and that PC leader Tim Hudak's call for a legislated, province-wide, mandatory broader public sector wage freeze is the right thing to do. It's the only thing to do so we can get this province back on track. We value our publicly funded education system, but in order for that public education system to be sustainable, we have to be able to afford it.

In Ontario, we have over 114,000 teachers. In the 2012 Ontario budget, the Liberals actually said that freezing teachers' wages, including their salary grid, is necessary if the government is going to meet its commitment to balance the budget. What happened? Instead of supporting my colleague Jeff Yurek's legislation in May to enact an immediate, across-the-board wage freeze for two years, your Liberal government has failed to negotiate a zero net compensation increase.

There's a problem here. This legislation is based on the OECTA MOU that allows teachers to move up the grid. As I said before, the Minister of Education has done a great job wrestling union friends to the ceiling so that 40% of teachers can move up the salary grid. It means that close to 18,000 unionized teachers in OECTA will receive salary increases of about \$7,000 over two years—totally unacceptable when the province is broke. When this deal is replicated across all unions and all boards,

45,000 teachers in total will continue to move up the grid, representing a cumulative cost of close to \$450 million in salary increases over two years. What kind of salary freeze is that? It's not a true wage freeze, and the costs won't be fully offset by giving teachers three unpaid days—Dalton days. They say it will save \$150 million, but given the \$450-million cost for moving up the grid, there is a \$300-million gap, a fiscal gap that the Liberals said, in their own budget, they wouldn't stand for. Who's making the calls here?

You know what? There are some 3,900-odd outstanding collective agreements that still need to be negotiated elsewhere in the government, and we're going to be in dire straits. The boat is taking on water, and the PCs have to continue to help bail this government out. That is why we have called on the Minister of Education to request that the Auditor General review her first fiscal plan and the OECTA MOU. Our education critic, from Nepean—Carleton, is spot-on when she has put that motion forward.

The effort we've seen from the Liberal government is a half-loaf, as my colleague from Barrie had mentioned before. We will continue to press for more wage freezes across the broader public service. Outside of the fiscal parameters, we are also concerned with the weakening of our school boards and the principals' ability to hire the best possible staff and ensure that proper assessment and reporting is continued. We are disappointed that a commitment by the Minister of Education to ensure that subclauses 19(1)(e)(i) and 19(1)(e)(ii) be removed from the bill to restore and empower the authority of school boards was not kept, proving again that this is the fine-print government and that Dalton is the fine-print Premier.

The Minister of Education is also suggesting that she would only make those changes via regulation and would force French and Catholic school boards to follow the original MOU. Talk about bullying. This is unacceptable to us, and that is why our education critic will use the process to make amendments to the bill. We support her wholeheartedly, and we encourage everyone in this House to do so as well. We want kids in the classroom come September. We want to get Ontario's fiscal house back in order, and we want to get this bill into committee to get the job done. We will lead the way.

This government has put some great ideas on the table, and we have countered with even better ideas, but the McGuinty Liberals have refused to sit down and listen to the leader of our party. Our party has ideas and they will not take them under consideration because the Liberal ideas that they think are so great are being underscored and forced upon them by whom? Is it the Minister of Education? Is it the party faithful? We have to ask those questions. Who is pulling the strings here?

As I said before, our leader has come to the table with even better ideas, but the Liberal government refuses to take his ideas under consideration. Needless to say, we're all here tonight bailing the Liberals out of yet another mess.

This is a systemic problem that has been created in Ontario, and in order for the public education system to be sustainable, we have to be able to afford it. We have to be able to afford our government in Ontario so that it's not breaking the backs of the moms and the dads who are paying the taxes. For too long, this government has not paid attention to the dire financial situation that has evolved over the last nine years. You've totally ignored it, and you don't keep up with the times.

When other nations, other provinces and our own country were hit by recession, the Liberal government in Ontario continued to spend at enormous rates that we couldn't afford. The Minister of Finance said that the third-largest spending priority outside of health care and education in our province is on the debt and the deficit. Servicing the debt and deficit in Ontario is larger than every other single government department combined outside of education and health care. It's just a travesty, and you know what? This is not the Ontario that we once knew. We need some leadership to get it back on track. It's unfortunate that we're not seeing that demonstrated by the Liberal government of today.

We are here because we are going to have to bring a legislated wage freeze. No one really wants to do that, but we know that people have to be put back to work so our students come first. The core difference between the PCs and the Ontario Liberal government is that we believe it needs to be applied across the board in a broader public service sector wage freeze. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Make this his 20 minutes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no, I've got to respond for two minutes first.

Through you, Speaker, to the members for Barrie and Huron—Bruce, I appreciated listening to the speeches, of course, and I was reminded by the remarks made by the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke who said we've got to whack everybody fairly. The two words he used were "fairness" and "equality." So if we're going to whack teachers in this manner, we should whack the others in the same way. I appreciate that.

I didn't hear whether that principle applies to the private sector in the same way, that in the same way they love to go after public sector workers, do you think you should whack the private sector workers in the same way? Given that Stats Canada has declared that the wages in the private sectors have been at an average 3%, much higher than the public sector—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh, Rosie, you've got that backwards. You've got that backwards. You've got to get back to the right stats.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no, no. I'm talking about Stats Canada. Speaker, through you, to all of them—because they're blah blah blah, all of them—this is Stats Canada; that's why I cited Stats Canada. That's one.

Secondly, does the same principle of fairness and equality apply to the corporate sectors, particularly the

individuals in those corporations who earn lots and lots of zeros in front of the ones or twos or threes or fours? Because, for me, it's a matter of equality as the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said. I just don't see how your system of justice applies just to some and not the others.

I would love to hear the member from Barrie or the member from Huron–Bruce speak to that notion of fairness and equality as it relates to the other sectors in society, if you don't mind.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's always interesting listening to some of my friends in the NDP. I was in the private sector, owning and operating a business in Toronto during that 2008 recession, and if you don't think people got whacked globally, from Paris to Singapore, when you've actually run a business and had to meet the payroll and lost sleep and gone without a paycheque for two or three months, you'll understand it. The NDP doesn't understand it, and that's their problem. The Tories, I don't know—for a Conservative Party, you would think that math comes as second nature. My friend from Huron–Bruce, I don't know what the school system is like in your constituency, but obviously it needs some more investment.

By us being here early, \$473 million is being avoided; that's what's avoided. The Minister of Education has pointed out \$1.4 billion in one-time savings; \$250 million in savings in year one from the 1.5%; \$500 million in the second year—and that offsets way more than the grid. So there's more than a net zero there.

The college sector just settled across the board at zero voluntarily, because some of us over here, having been trade unionists and members of CUPE, have a problem with you. You don't seem to understand that when you work in the public sector, it's about public service, and the few little things you get when you work the hours that teachers do or, you know, I come from a family who worked as cleaning people—very marginal labour—a little more respect for them. These aren't people who are riding high or gouging that, and we are trying to bargain collectively. You know, I've been mayor of a city. I expect the Leader of the Opposition to have a little bit more experience to understand. I've led a public sector negotiation of 17 different agreements. He hasn't got an understanding of the constitutionality or of labour law. What he is proposing would cost us hundreds of millions of dollars in lawsuits. Until he understands that, he shouldn't be trying to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you, Minister.

Questions and comments? The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

From time to time, I get a little confused on whether or not they actually want our support for this legislation, because from time to time I've heard this massive

criticism. But they do need this assembly to pass the budget, and they've forgotten that after October 6, 2011, they were reduced to a minority government—a lot of their colleagues were defeated—and they're going to need our support to pass this, which we said we would do.

Now, I want to say thank you very much to my colleague from Barrie, who I think gave a great presentation about why teachers are important to his family; I congratulate him. I want to say thank you to our member from Huron–Bruce. She has been a tireless advocate in our caucus for rural schools, and I know her community of Blythe has been hard hit because this government decided they would rather spend money on the cancellation of a \$190-million power plant than to keep that school viable.

Now, I know there are some challenges in the Liberal caucus right now. There's a little bit of a split; we've been told that. I'm just going to encourage you to pass this legislation and work with us. We'll continue to bail you out.

But to my colleague from Winnipeg, or Toronto Centre, I understand his math might be a bit shaky, but you know what? We can't all build million-dollar toilets. The reality is, Speaker, when we're facing a \$30-billion deficit because of his government, we have to take some measures. We might not like taking those measures, but we've got to take the measures. And the reality is that we know that in the OECTA road map they have a \$300-million hole because it's going to cost us \$450 million as the teachers go up the grid and they only have \$150 million in offsets. That's why we want the Auditor General to review their numbers, because my goodness, we all know that's the fine-print government, and they've got the fine-print Premier. People in Ontario want to read the fine print on this group.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker.

It's a bit daunting for me to follow these great oratory statements from the member for Barrie, the member for Huron–Bruce, the member for Trinity–Spadina, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and, finally, the member for Nepean–Carleton. All these speakers have put good points, some of which I agree with and some of which we disagree with.

The tragic thing is that while we're speaking here—and these points could be done in a method of non-crisis management—what we're doing here, what the government's doing here is creating crisis, insinuating that there won't be schools open and that the teachers aren't going to work, which is—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Silly.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. It's imitation crisis management.

We should have been dealing with these—and we have financial problems in Ontario, there's no doubt. I

think everyone in this House is aware of that, and everyone in this House wants to help fix it.

We're talking about kids. We say we're talking about kids but actually—and I was never this cynical until I watched this—we are talking about a by-election. That's what we're talking about, folks. We're talking about a majority or a minority. Let's make it clear. That's what we're talking about, folks, and that is a travesty because if we really wanted to talk about kids, if we really were serious about talking about this bill, we could have talked about it this morning; we could have talked about it yesterday.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Barrie has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to thank all those who have spoken to this: the member from Trinity-Spadina, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane and my own colleague from Ottawa-Nepean—I'm glad I got all those right.

I think it's clear what we're dealing with here is a failure to negotiate. When you come to a point where you've had so much time to come to a solution and when you hear that the solution really is very similar to one that the teachers are willing to accept anyway—insomuch as we heard time and time again, they're willing to accept a wage freeze; they don't have an issue with the wage freeze—you have to negotiate with them to get there.

Having come from a background of labour relations myself, I know the value of negotiating and what you can get out of that. It's always a win-win-win, and that third win is for the people of Ontario. That's what we're not getting here. I think this is being a little bit exploitative of them—this legislation—at this time. It truly is an attempt to get attention for a by-election that's backfiring on you. Clearly, this is backfiring on you.

When only four of 72 boards have reached agreements, you've frantically recalled this Legislature. We're sitting weeks early and nights late to force through legislation at the 11th hour. It is half a loaf. It's too little, too late because our economy is circling the bowl right now.

We are the worst-performing province in Ontario for our economy. There's no getting away from that. You can say whatever you want. The fact remains that you need to do more than take on one of 4,000 collective bargaining agreements. You need to do it all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Trinity-Spadina who, I'm sure, is going to go through the Chair when he speaks.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Always, always through you from now on.

Speaker, I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 115. I'm happy to remind the Minister of Innovation that we're still number 10 in this country. Funding on a per capita basis is the lowest in the country for our students in the post-secondary education system. Numero dieci. Numéro dix. Last. Nothing to be proud of.

To the Minister of Innovation and post-secondary ed, I've got to tell you that when half of the college teachers

work on contract, you can't be proud of that. Something is wrong. When half of the college system is working on a part-time basis, meaning that they don't get the same wages as the full-time professors, and they don't have the same benefits, why do they do that? Because when the provincial government doesn't flow the money to the universities and college system, they have to hire part-time workers who work harder than the full-time workers. And he pretends he's not listening to me, as I speak.
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Number 10: Just yesterday there was a report by some economists and social agencies that said, as it relates to social services, we used to be number seven; we are now number 10. Numéro dix. Numero dieci. Last. It's getting worse. Yet, under this government, we hear from them how great they are. How great can you be when you're last? I just don't understand that kind of mathematics. But in Liberal politics, number 10 is good, if not the best.

I have to tell you, the minister—the Premier; not the minister for the moment—the Premier, he used to walk on water. I say biblically, he used to walk on water with teachers. Not no more; Speaker, not no more. I wonder to myself why he did that, because there was lots of love with teachers and the Premier. In fact, for the last three elections, they've been voting for the Premier of education, and all of a sudden, he just gives it away, literally gives it away, 5,000 people out there.

I would have let Lisa MacLeod speak, just so that they could hear her side of things. She was there. Kim Craitore was there; I would have let him speak, just to see what he had to say.

Mr. Robert Bailey: What about the minister?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The minister wasn't there. So 5,000 teachers unhappy with the education Premier. What happened along the way? He cannot walk on water no more. It's done. It's gone. It's over. But he thought, "I've got other people. Don't worry. I can afford to lose the teachers." Well, all the backbenchers say how much they love teachers. I heard them yesterday. I heard them today. Each and every one of them, whether they were trustees or otherwise, they all love them still. My fear is that it's not interchangeable any longer, that it's no longer mutual, because you can't love if they don't love you back. I suppose you could, because I hear you say how much you love them. It's possible.

But why would the Premier give up so much love? Why would he give it all away? You see, it's money we're talking about. They have a few bucks—through you, Speaker, they have a few bucks to give. They also have workers—and at the end of the day, they go "hmpf" to a Liberal member—and most of them voted for you, and you're giving that up. Oh, you have; oh, yes. Yes, I guarantee it 101%—not 99%; 101%. Add the one on top of the 100. You see, you could have had it all. You know why you could have had it all? Because teachers were so happy to give; they were. The Tories don't think so; I understand that. But they were happy to give it all away, literally. They were happy to give the freeze, if you can believe it; they were, because they understood the eco-

nomie situation, the economic problems we are in—not caused by them. They were quite happy to collaborate. But no, at the end of the day, the Liberals decided, “No, this collaboration stuff doesn’t really work. We’ve got to do something. We’ve got to shake things up because we are in trouble electorally. The polls show that we are in trouble, and we’ve got to beat somebody up.” So what does the Minister of Education do? She calls John Snobelen up and says, “John, how did you do it?” And John told her how to do it.

Interjection: He knows.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: John knew. He was good; he was good. I thought to myself, “Okay, I understand how it works. They need to create a crisis.” The Minister of Education decided, “I’m going to get tough.” Now, hear me: The Minister of Education doesn’t get tough unless the Premier says to her, “Go ahead and do it. It’s okay.” It didn’t happen on its own. No minister goes out on his or her own without the approval of the Premier and/or his staff—and sometimes they’re one and the same. Trust me: That’s how the system works. For the backbenchers who haven’t been there, that’s how it works. Some of you know, because in your caucus meetings you talk about it. I know how that works too. And I know that you are bold soldiers and you pretend that you’re on the same team. But some of you are saying, “Damn. Why don’t they listen to me? I’m telling them this is going to hurt, right?” Mike Coteau, from Scarborough—

Interjection: Don Valley East.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Don Valley East—I’m sure he was one of them who said, “This is going to hurt us, Premier,” or to the minister, “This is going to hurt us. It’s going to be painful.” I’m sure he said that. My friend from Scarborough—Agincourt as well would have said, “This is going to hurt us.” The member from Guelph, who has good experience, being the former chair of the trustees’ association across Ontario, would have said, “This is not good.” I suspect that she is a progressive on this matter and would have said, “We’re in trouble on this.” But no. Do you think the Minister of Education was listening? You think the Premier was listening to that advice?

Other members, like Kim Craitor, to name one, who obviously has spoken out on this, because he’s got the courage to do so—but all the others say, “We can’t do that. We can’t do what Kim is doing.” He’s allowed to do it because he has done it, but the others are saying, “We have to stay mum.” The true soldiers who stand up to say how much they love teachers, which always gives me a little laughter when I see it—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But you’re good soldiers; I admire you. I admire you, because I wouldn’t have the courage to speak. I would not get up and say how much I love the teachers after we beat them up. I couldn’t do that. But that’s right: I admire you all when you stand up and say, “No, no. We’ve got to do it.” This is an act of puerile politics, and you guys stand up and do no differently than some of the other governments that I shall not

name because they will be upset. But the public knows who I’m talking about.

When you call a bill—what do we call this bill?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Putting children first.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Putting children first. There we go. Does it remind you of any particular government I shall not name that for years used to come up with these titles that belied the very content of the bill?

Mr. Mario Sergio: Smallitics.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You know what I’m talking about, Mario. You were here. When you have titles like that, my point is that it’s puerile. You look silly. You become silly politically, particularly with those members—and we have many in our caucus, but I dare say some Conservative members—who just don’t get it and really do believe that it should be done right. They don’t like this kind of politics. I have to admit that if we should ever get in power—and I suspect it will happen—I would have—

Interjections: What?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know you’re incredulous; I understand. Things come around. Things come around—

Mr. Michael Prue: Wait till next Monday night, when the Liberals lose Quebec.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —and you, in the end, will say, “Behold, God does exist.” It will come around. But for me to get into government and do what so many others have done—I just couldn’t do it. I couldn’t be a faithful soldier. I couldn’t do it.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: But you were.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I could not do it, Minister of Housing. I could not any more. I might have been able to do it a long time ago, but no more; I can tell you that. I can tell you.

See, the problem we have is that the educational system is in trouble. In spite of all the things you say, the educational system is in trouble and now, in relation to many, many years ago, incredibly underfunded. In spite of all that stuff about how much you love them and how much you’re pouring money into it, more boards, Catholic and public, are in a crisis situation each and every year, and the member from Don Valley East knows this.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But you can. No one prevents you from doing that.

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Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It appears we have some cross-talking going on. Let’s try and go through the Chair and keep it down to a dull roar. It was nice there, and then a few members came back in and it seems to have started all over again. So I think we’re going to pull the plug in a few minutes on a couple of people. So I would suggest we settle down a little bit. Thanks.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: These changes that the government has made with this law, these changes are permanent, and that’s why teachers are incredibly upset. You’re making changes without their consent. The

government in the past, both the Premier and the finance minister, talked about how we need to do this together—we have to do it together. This government has broken this rule, and they have unilaterally decided to change those rules. That's why I say that the Premier cannot walk on water no more, because you've changed the rules, and these are permanent changes that will affect your relationship with them for a long, long time. And all of you know that those teachers are going to go to another political party and many of you are profoundly worried, and you know that I suspect where it will go. I dare not say where, but I think you have a clue.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: You remember Rae days.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, yes, indeed, I remember them; I was there. I remember it so well that I want to tell you that some of us have learned from it. And those of you who remain behind will learn from this bill. You will, 10 years hence, say, "Why did we allow it?" You will. I guarantee it. That's the way the system works. While you're in it, you can't help yourselves, and you say, "Well, the Premier has decided this. What are we going to do?"

Mr. Robert Bailey: Stand up. Stand up to him.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No. I know another party that did the same. It happened with the pensions, and most of those party members decided that they liked what their Premier was doing at the time, and when he was gone, things were a little different. You will see it in 10 years, I guarantee it.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The pension?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no; their mistake.

This is about attacking the middle class, and you are attacking them deliberately. There's a purpose to your attacks. You're attacking teachers because you believe, as Mike Harris did, that in doing so you will get the broader public sector to support you. And in my view you've made a profound mistake, because you will never get the right-wing votes—the Conservative votes. Sorry about right-wing; it's just so harsh—the Conservative votes. You will never get the Conservatives because the Conservatives know they do it better than you.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's true.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They will whack people and they will whack them decisively and clearly. You guys are not as good, you guys are not as clear on those things. You whack them, but not as good as them. They are like Whac-A-Moles; the Whac-A-Mole kind of stuff, and it's ongoing—bang, bang, bang. You guys can't do it. You don't see the whole picture. You don't; they do. So the Conservative votes you hope to get, you're not getting. It is my view; I could be wrong. But you never know. You are very, very determined to get those other votes, hoping, as you did this, that you will hold on to teacher votes—you won't. Now, you will hold on to some OECA members but you will lose many of them as well. You will lose many of them as well.

It's a choice that you have made and it's very deliberate: You are attacking middle-class folks because you believe out there that in dividing workers you will

accomplish some political ends, and the political end is Kitchener–Waterloo. It is. And for me, to do so just to win one seat, it is below you. It is below the education Premier. It is below him. You could have done it differently, and you would have probably won this election. You've given it away. God bless. I'm okay with that.

And in creating this crisis, you're saying to those middle-class workers that you don't really care about them. What you're saying to them is that the cause of these economic woes, these economic problems, is the teachers. They're saying it's the teachers and the other public servants. You're saying, for the moment, that it's the teachers.

You don't get at the real problems, and there are three. One, corporate taxes that this fine Conservative Party has been giving away forever, like la piñata that they could strike at every day. You know those piñatas? And those billions of dollars just come flowing down to the corporations as they put it into their fine, deep pockets—\$500 billion socked away that the fine Tories are happy to give—and the Liberals doing just as well, just as good, until we have a minority government and we force them to put a freeze on corporate taxes.

They will never say it out loud. They don't even talk about it, for God's sake. They don't even speak a word about that. They're going to save up to \$850 million because of that move. Save, I say. Why? Because that money would not create one single job, except take it away and reduce our public services, reduce our inability to pay our college system well so that we could hire full-time college professors, so we could make certain that funds go to our public education system as well, so we could make sure that tuition fees stay low and not continue to rise through the roof. But between the Tories and the Liberals, we just keep giving it away.

Boy, was there resistance to the surtax on the \$500,000 income earners. Was there resistance in that caucus, except for the soldiers who said, "What's wrong with that? What's wrong with it?" They kept saying that to McGuinty, "What's wrong with that?" and to Dwight, the Finance Minister, "What's wrong with that?" until finally they said, "Okay." They gave in, right? But they gave in reluctantly—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I do.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: No, you don't.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, yes, I do.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: No, you don't.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You can say what you want, but we know.

Now, the Tories on the surtax—boy, they hate those taxes. They hate any form of tax. Their federal counterparts even hate the GST, and they've given up 10 million bucks every year. They would have eliminated the deficit if that GST had stayed on. But no, not Tories. They like to cut taxes to the bone, God bless. You guys are good.

Boy, would we be creating jobs if we tied our support to corporations that create long-term, good-paying jobs. We don't talk about that. What do we do? We've got the education Premier attacking teachers, "They're overpaid." Even some of the soldiers say, "Oh, but we've got to look. Some people are really hurting out there, so teachers have got to take their cuts." That's the language that some of the soldiers are using here today.

You're mistaken in your politics. You're doing it all wrong. You are. I can't help you any more. I've been trying for years to help you. I don't know how to help you.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's not working. Speaker, through you, it's not working. I'm trying real hard. What you're doing is not working. Attacking teachers, the middle-class folks, is not working. You've got to find a better way, because you're going down. You know that, right? Yes.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: My friend from Trinity-Spadina is really confused. If you want to understand what attacking unions and attacking teachers is about, and compare us to a reasonable standard, look at the labour legislation that they proposed. The Conservatives proposed something that is the most extreme full-frontal attack on organized labour. It basically is something equivalent to the southern Republicans' right-to-work state or, as I call it, the right to a job that pays bubkes approach.

Do you want to understand who the enemy is on that? All you have to do is look to your immediate right and compare. If you can't figure out the difference, you've got a problem.

What has the federal NDP done, now that it has 100 seats? It has abandoned every social democratic program and looks more like the federal Liberal Party than the federal Liberal Party looks like the federal Liberal Party. So don't talk to me about moral principle, because you have politics of convenience that would make Jean Chrétien blush in the moment of his greatest popularity.

The other thing that really kills me is you've just exposed yourself, my dear friend from Trinity-Spadina, because do you know what you just did?

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Oh, please. Don't—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Just remember who is talking right now. What did you say? Our Premier is not the Premier of teachers' unions; our Premier is the Premier of education. It's always interesting to me that you disown your own government and party, and now you tell us the lessons are that we should have buckled to the unions and been intimidated by them and collapsed at the bargaining table and given them everything they wanted, which in this case would mean taking away early child-

hood education and all the advances. We're standing up, not to teachers and not to most teachers unions, but to a couple of extremists who would actually put 20,000 teachers and support workers out of work and take away and reduce the quality of childhood education. That's the difference between the Liberal Party and your party. Your party's lesson is, buckle and cave in to unions; don't protect early childhood education, because you are the party of extreme labour and our Premier is standing up for all—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Time has expired. Questions and comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to offer a response to the member from Trinity-Spadina. Perhaps he'll listen if I say it in his own language: Come stai stasera?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Bene, bene.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Grazie. Bello discorso. Grande discorso. However, I might not agree with all of it. I'll translate it later. "Bello discorso": Good speech. I don't really agree with all of it. Our leader, Tim Hudak, has been very clear that he doesn't want to derail a school year. In fact, the Ontario PC caucus would appreciate no disturbances whatsoever, so that kids can be in the classroom and we can begin to implement somewhat of a wage freeze to get Ontario back on track.

This bill is the first recognition by the Ontario Liberal government that their spending is out of control and that PC leader Tim Hudak's call for a legislated province-wide mandatory broader public wage freeze is the right thing to do to get the province back on track.

We do have other ideas as well, as our leaders spoke with the Premier back in November about cutting corporate taxes back to 10%; reviewing all of the agencies, boards and commissions; cutting red tape; and revamping the arbitration system. Perhaps the Premier said it best in the National Post. I don't have a copy of it here, but I'll try to paraphrase: "We can't continue to do what we've done for the last nine years." I have to say, I'm fairly certain everybody in our caucus agrees with the Premier on that point. We simply cannot continue to do what we've done over the last nine years. Ciao bello.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Any further questions and comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to this. The member from Trinity-Spadina is usually such a happy, optimistic guy. But tonight he is just as negative as can be. I thought that I would like to take this opportunity to give you eight facts about our students, about our school system, that will cheer you up again—eight facts:

(1) Ontario schools are the best in the English-speaking world. The Economist describes Ontario's school system as one of the best-performing school systems in the world.

(2) Our 15-year-old students are among the top 10 in the world for literacy.

(3) Our grade 8 students are leading the country in math, reading and science, and Ontario kids are the only ones who scored above the national average in reading.

(4) Grad rates: High school graduation rates have gone from 68% when we took office to 82% in 2011. That's almost 100,000 more students with their high school diploma than would have had, had we not taken the action we did.

(5) The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program shows that Ontario students are the only students in the country who are achieving above the national average in math, reading and science, and lead the country in reading.

(6) PISA, an OECD organization, confirmed this: Ontario students are among the best in the world.

(7) The OECD recognized Ontario in an education report called Strong Performers and Successful Reformers as a world leader—a world leader—in professional—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): I'm sorry, the time has expired.

Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to say that it's always entertaining to listen to the member from Trinity-Spadina. Please allow me, since we do have an Italian flavour.

Remarks in Italian.

Thank you for that.

You mentioned many things, but one of the things you didn't really talk about is the children, the students. We spoke about politics, we spoke about by-elections, we spoke about unions, but we didn't talk a lot about the kids and about the students. I want to say that the reason we're here is because of our kids, our families, because of our students. That's the main reason.

Now, we are here also because these contracts expire on August 31. This was said months ago; negotiations began back in February. We have some partners that have come on board. We have a deadline; that's the deadline. The contracts roll over, and the truth is that we cannot afford, in the challenging financial times we are living in, these contracts.

There's another point I want to make. We spoke about the teachers. I think teachers are crucial to our society. We can't really plan and build a strong economy without them and we can't build the leaders of the future. But the respect for teachers doesn't belong to one particular party. It doesn't belong to the NDP or to the Conservatives or to the Liberals. Everyone can have respect for teachers, even though at this point in time we cannot afford to treat them as in the past. Thank you, Rosario. Grazie.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): The member for Trinity-Spadina has two minutes for his response.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you to the members who spoke.

It's not about affordability, affording or not being able to afford. It isn't. It's not about the kiddies. It's not. It's about politics. This is about politics. I know you don't want to say it is. I know what you all have to say—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, I guarantee it's about politics, because when you don't like the teachers you call them unions and when you like them you call them federations. There are two distinctions: "federation" is a better-sounding name whereas "union" is just so nasty. The Tories used to call them "union bosses." You guys don't do that, although I heard the minister of post-secondary ed use "unions" tonight in a very negative way, which I thought was interesting.

My point is that it's not about kids, because if the teacher federations were interested in working out a deal, which they say—maybe you don't believe them; from what I've gathered from their public announcements, including from private discussions I've had with them, they were quite happy to basically give you much of what you are forcing them to take. If that is true, and I believe it to be true, then I say to myself, what's the motivation behind this? If they are doing this voluntarily, why do you force them to accept a deal that will sever your relationship with them for the next 15 to 20 years? Worse, I dare say, than the social contract. I say that because these changes will be much more permanent than the social contract. The social contract was a very limited issue for a limited time. What you guys are doing is going to last. The changes will hurt many teachers, and they will not forgive you. They will not forgive you because you could have done it peacefully in a collaborative manner but you decided to beat them up, and for that you will pay. You will pay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Further debate?

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Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise tonight to speak about Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, to provide an overview as well as some context, some history, about this bill and talk about younger teachers.

Teacher and support staff contracts will expire on August 31, just about two days from now. That's why we have been working with many of our partners for almost six months to establish a new, sustainable education funding framework. In July, the government signed an agreement—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Excuse me. I can hardly hear you for the discussion that's taking place immediately to my right. I would ask the House leaders, if they have a discussion, to take it elsewhere, because I think I would like to hear the member from Scarborough—Agincourt. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms. Soo Wong: In July, the government signed an agreement with OECTA, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. This agreement represents a road map that balances the need for us to reach fiscal targets while protecting investments in the full-day kindergarten program, smaller class sizes and the classroom experience.

This agreement is reflected in the proposed Putting Students First Act. It is a fair and balanced approach that

will benefit Ontario's youngest teachers and will help preserve 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs. Teachers at more than half of Ontario school boards have now signed agreements with the province, and now we need the rest of the teachers' unions and boards to do their part.

The proposed legislation would take effect on September 1 and will provide, until December 31, 2012, for all school boards, teachers and support staff to engage in local bargaining. This would allow boards and unions to reach local agreements while also including the parameters set out in the legislation. Where any agreement does not meet the standards of the legislation, the Minister of Education will have the power to withhold approval of the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, before introducing this legislation in the House, we took a number of steps to release the legislation publicly and to the opposition parties. We did receive constructive feedback from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition—I want to acknowledge that piece. That's why the bill has changed to reflect their advice. Without amending the memorandum of understanding we signed with OECTA after over 300 hours of discussions, we incorporated these changes in the bill before introduction to help speed passage of the bill.

The diagnostics and fair hiring provisions will only be entrenched for our partners who have signed or will sign an agreement by August 31. Those partners who have not signed an agreement will not have those provisions entrenched in local agreements. Mr. Speaker, this was a tough decision for us to make. Our strong preference always was to have these provisions in each and every local collective agreement and in law. But minority calls for reasonable compromise. We will instead move forward non-legislative tools that will allow us to enact these policies.

I want to have this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to talk about younger teachers. As a former school board trustee, I recognize the concerns of thousands of younger teachers in our system, and I'm proud our government is taking steps to address younger teachers in our schools. The McGuinty government supports Ontario's young teachers, as shown in our OECTA MOU and the proposed Putting Students First Act.

We are introducing fair hiring practices to the education sector. There are teachers who have completed college who have been supply teaching and been on occasional teachers' lists for some time—in many cases, many years—not sure what the process is to be hired on a permanent basis.

The MOU sets out fair hiring practices that will bring transparency and accountability to teacher hiring practices and make them consistent across the province. The OECTA MOU also ensures that every school board understands the rules and hiring practices, Mr. Speaker. While management will still make the ultimate decision about whom to hire, their role comes with the responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood by all.

We also recognize the impact on young teachers of retired teachers who have returned as substitutes. We are working with the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. As of September 1, retired teachers will be limited to a maximum of 50 teaching days per year, down from 95. This opens supply days and classroom teaching for young professionals.

During my term as a trustee for the school board, I heard many concerns about not supporting our young teachers, and I want to remind my colleagues opposite that previous governments, both PC and NDP governments, never had the leadership or the courage to address the concerns and needs of our younger teachers. Now we're finally addressing their concerns, and it is the right thing to do.

Let me also remind my colleagues in the House: This legislation also ensures that younger teachers who do not have banked sick days, which was not previously supported, can use sick days and can go on maternity leave. The new sick leave plan allows younger teachers by providing some income protection for serious illnesses and improves the maternity leave provision, and that is the right thing to do—again, supporting young teachers.

Many of us have communicated with our constituents. Some of them are younger teachers; some of them are about to be retired teachers. We all recognize that younger teachers have contributed to the system. They've been properly trained. They are keen, they're enthusiastic, and most important, they want opportunity. This proposed legislation is providing that opportunity.

I cannot stress enough why this legislation is so clear in terms of hiring practices, now supporting younger teachers having opportunity in the classroom. Each one of us in this House has met or has spoken on the phone or in email with a younger teacher, and they're pleading with us: "Give us opportunity." When are they going to get the opportunity, if not through legislation, if not through this House? Who is going to give these young teachers an opportunity, Mr. Speaker? With regard to this legislation, it is the right thing to do.

I also want to remind my colleagues opposite that this legislation is not just about protecting one part of the teaching profession but ensuring fair hiring practices, because there has been inconsistency of hiring practices across Ontario. For the first time, we now have transparency, and we're making sure school boards know what are fair hiring practices and the guidelines they must undertake.

Most importantly, now you have transparency. One thing is accountability; another is making sure everybody knows what the hiring practices are all about, and that's what this proposed legislation is about. I have been a trustee with the previous Rae government. The Rae days affected the classroom. I've been a trustee when it was the PC government, closing down schools, firing the teachers. I've been there. At the end of the day, we're looking at a fair, transparent and accountable process. We're not laying off teachers; we're not. We're making sure the system is continuing the success we have gained.

We heard today from the Premier that EQAO results show our students are doing better than before, and more students are graduating from our system.

More importantly, this new legislation that we're proposing is ensuring hiring practices across Ontario. We have all heard that younger teachers have been disadvantaged. Younger teachers have been disadvantaged in terms of the retired teachers coming back in for X number of days now. Through this legislation, it's a maximum of 50 days, allowing younger teachers an opportunity in the classroom experiences to apply what they learned in teachers' college and from experiential learning into the classroom.

This legislation also ensures that every single school board knows about the fair hiring practices. Without this transparency and accountability, different school boards would have different kinds of hiring practices. We cannot allow publicly funded school boards to have inconsistency in hiring practices. And this is the right thing to do.

At the end of the day, we might argue that we are wanting the wage salary freeze across the board—we want to make sure younger teachers, who are the future of this province, are given an opportunity to be in the classroom, to apply what they have learned in teachers' college and to go into the classroom. This is the right thing to do.

It also provides employment opportunities, because we know younger teachers haven't been given an opportunity to be in the classroom. It is a concern all of us recognize. Now, for the first time, our government is addressing the younger teachers' needs and concerns, because previous governments have never addressed their concerns. They have talked about it; well, the talking stops right here. We are going to make sure that for younger teachers, their credentials, their learning skills, are being recognized, and they will be given an opportunity, Mr. Speaker. That's the right thing to do.

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The other piece—I know the legislation talks about the diagnostic tests. The concern in the past had been, what is the role of a teacher in terms of these diagnostic assessments? I know that our teachers know our students best, because they know little Johnny in his classroom well. So they will be a part of the assessment testing. Our commitment in terms of student achievement is part of this discussion, because at the end of the day, who knows the students best? The teachers. So at the end of the day, they will be a part of this diagnostics assessment and they will be consulted. We have heard loud and clear from parents who are concerned about their child with special needs that they haven't been involved or the teacher hasn't been consulted. They will be given an opportunity to be part of this diagnostic test assessment, and also as a part of this assessment piece they will have a clear voice, so they will ensure that the learning needs of the young students in the classroom are being protected.

The other piece about the diagnostic assessment is the fact that it must be fair, it must be current and it must reflect the learner's needs. Many of us in this room have

a teaching background. We know that we have the experience. We know that teachers know the students best and they know how to advocate for their students. So with regard to there having been a lot of concerns about what the diagnostic assessments are all about and who will be doing them, we recognize that piece. We also recognize that teachers need to lead these assessments, because they know their students best.

The OECTA MOU requires that teachers conduct these assessments, instead of testing for the sake of testing. We don't want the testing because someone recommended it or the principal drives it. No, this is driven but also done by the teacher. We wanted to make sure that the assessment reflects the needs of the students and that it will help the students' learning needs. Because this, at the end of the day, will help the learners. If we don't, somebody else is going to be asking for that piece, and how are we going to ensure that piece?

We are very proud of the achievements we have gained in terms of education, not just about the EQAO rating. Internationally, we've been recognized by the OECD. We've also been recognized about full-day kindergarten. I have a significant diverse student population in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt. I know that full-day kindergarten helps the young students in the schools in my riding, because at the end of the day, it not only provides early learning; it also provides the social interactions. Many of my young students are only children. That interaction, early learning, but also learning English as a second language, ensures our students' success. Many of the students in my riding are raised by their grandparents, as opposed to their parents, because culturally, grandparents take the lead in the parenting of our young people. I know for a fact that full-day kindergarten provides that early learning and supporting of literacy skills and numeracy skills, but also supporting full-day kindergarten is the family literacy centre. All of this is critical for learning. It's not just about in-classroom stuff. The young child's grandmother can bring him or her into the parenting and literacy centre to provide the literacy support, because many of the students in my riding have English as a second language. This support is critical for learning. I have visited many parenting and literacy centres in my riding, and they have been consistently telling me that these learning centres help support what they do at home as well as in the classroom.

So at the end of the day, what are we here for? I know my colleagues have expressed concerns returning to the Legislature two weeks early. But we are here for our constituents, especially the youngest members of our society, our students. At the end of the day, we are here to support their learning needs, protect their learning needs, but most importantly to ensure they will have a successful school year.

Next Tuesday, all the school boards will be opening their schools. I know many of the teachers in my riding are going back into the classrooms already, making sure the classrooms are clean and to prepare and get ready for

class. I'm thrilled they are doing a great job, making sure they're ready for the young students in the classroom.

Equally, we also want to make sure the younger teachers who are now waiting to find out if they are going to be hired in September—they now have hope, they now have opportunity to think they'll maybe be hired back or that they will be given an opportunity. At the end of the day, what future do these young teachers have—they graduated from a faculty of education with a bachelor of education at a minimum, many with a master's degree, and have no opportunities. What future are these young teachers going to have if we don't, through this proposed legislation, provide the support they need? They have asked us many, many times, not just our government but previous governments, for help. This is the first time we are recognizing that piece, and we are going to acknowledge it and put it in writing. That is the right thing to do. We need to make sure that not just the youngest students in the classroom, the four-year-olds, are supported, but the youngest teachers in our system are being supported as well.

What can I say? I know there have been some comments made that this proposed legislation is about the by-elections. Well, I beg to differ. At the end of the day, we're here for the young people, the youngest people in our classrooms, the youngest citizens of this province. We also need to support the younger teachers. Nobody in this House can say the younger teachers in this province do not need the support. Every one of us has heard about the concerns and the needs of the younger teachers. Which other party, except for our current government, has reduced the maximum number of days for retired teachers to come back? Which other government has addressed the needs of younger teachers? None. I've been there, serving under both the previous PC and the previous Rae governments. I know.

Our proposed legislation is not laying off teachers. We are not laying off teachers. We are building new schools. In Scarborough we are putting up a new elementary school.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: A school in Peterborough just closed down.

Ms. Soo Wong: That's because there are no students; it's student enrolment. We all know what drives the opening of a school.

We are all here for the youngest citizens, the future of this province, but also to support another education sector: the youngest teachers. If we don't support these younger teachers—everyone is talking about them, but no one is really supporting them in writing. Our government is. We have taken the position to ensure younger teachers will be successful, and we are doing the right thing. I challenge any one of you to say younger teachers don't need to be supported. The previous Harris government, the previous Rae government, none of you ever addressed the needs and concerns of younger teachers. We know they need to be supported, and they will be supported through this proposed legislation.

Before I end my remarks, I also want to recognize and applaud the minister. Once again the minister is taking the leadership role to address the concerns of the entire province. It is not just about one or two school boards; it's about the entire province, making sure we have equity, making sure we address the financial challenges. And it's not just about the fiscal challenge piece. We also recognize that our values, our principles, are to protect education. That's why my family came to Canada. That's why my family came to the province of Ontario. As a first-generation Chinese Canadian, I can tell you that many new Canadians come to this province because of the public education. I kid you not. Many of the international students coming to Toronto, coming to our province, come for the public education.

Don't get to thinking this is not about education. It is about education. I challenge any one of you to do better than we are. You have no record to say that your EQAO ratings were better. You have no record to say you are supporting young people. At the end of the day, it is about kids. Remember that.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob Leone: I listened with interest to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt and her commentary. I have to suggest that she is probably not very accurate that we've done nothing. I know when I was teaching at Wilfrid Laurier's Brantford campus, I taught a course in which the students at Nipissing University who were at teachers' college took a course with me. To say we've done nothing for teachers would be a falsehood because I, in fact, taught them.

The reality of it is, that government, that party, cannot do anything for young teachers unless the PC party and the PC caucus here bail them out. That's the reality of it. Without our support, you can't help young teachers. To think you have a monopoly on young teachers, I think, is an erroneous statement, frankly.

We're here today to debate a bill, Bill 115—what do they call it? The Putting Students First Act. It's a great title. I'm going to talk about the title at length when I get a chance to speak in this debate. But that's what we are here to do. We got recalled here at the 11th hour to debate a bill that's called Putting Students First which really should be titled Bailing out the Liberal Party Now, because without our help, they would be nowhere.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Quit politicking.

Mr. Rob Leone: The Minister of Agriculture says I am politicking? I am politicking? I can't believe such a statement when you have created a crisis at the 11th hour. Your government called—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Cambridge?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, folks, I know it's late, and we are all getting tired. The Minister of Agriculture is not in his seat, and he's yelling across

the floor. The member from Cambridge is yelling back at him and not going through the Chair. We know the decorum; we know the rules. Let's stick to the program, folks. I know it's late, but it's going to be later if we don't get on with it. So thank you.

The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much. I listened intently, both the short time I was in the chair and here in this seat, to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt. I'm reminded of the great saying by Socrates. The most famous thing he was ever quoted as saying is, "Sir, I would gladly be persuaded by you, but not against my better judgment." Having listened, I don't think that in any judgmental way one could consider what the member from Scarborough–Agincourt had to say as being relevant.

Quite frankly, I listened to the Minister of Health rhyme off eight reasons why the schools in Ontario were the best in the world, and the eight reasons why they were the best all pre-dated this legislation. It all happened because we have the best teachers in the world. We have the best support staff in the world. We have an opportunity in the schools that look after children, especially disadvantaged children and especially children who don't speak English as a first language.

So we have a member who stands up here and says all of this has to be protected by some kind of draconian legislation against teachers who haven't even taken a strike vote, against teachers who have already promised they don't want a raise in money, against school boards who weren't even consulted that their rights to bargain collectively—and I'm talking here about management—have been taken away. Here, even the management and the school trustees—and this member was a school trustee. What would she be saying today at the Toronto board when she found out that the province of Ontario wanted to take away the rights that she had? She would have been a democratically elected person. And all of those school trustees across Ontario, all of them, who are democratically elected to negotiate with teachers unions and others, have been told they are no longer relevant. All of this is part of that legislation, and I don't understand how she can stand here and say those things and draw those conclusions, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and through you, I want to say the speech delivered tonight by the member from Scarborough–Agincourt was outstanding. Let me tell you why. You know what? She inherited the mantle of one of the finest members who ever served here, the Honourable Gerry Phillips, and I can tell you that Gerry would be proud tonight of that speech that you just delivered in this Legislature.

Let's put this in context. From 1990 to 1995, the NDP government social contract: 12 unpaid days and 5% of the teaching complement of the province of Ontario gone.

Then, in 1995 to 2003, we had a billion dollars taken out of the education budget of the province of Ontario. Teachers were on the picket line month in and month out. I remember that my poor wife was pregnant with our second child and had to be on the picket line at St. Teresa school in Peterborough. That's what they were all about.

We have put over \$6.6 billion into the education budget to make this the very best education system, with two families, in the province of Ontario, and people day in and day out are proud of our accomplishments here. If I had three hours, Mr. Speaker, I could go through the eight points by the Minister of Health, but you're not going to give me three hours tonight so I could go through them on a point-by-point basis. Maybe tomorrow I'll get the opportunity to make that speech.

We have excellent teachers. As I said, Arne Duncan, President Barack Obama's education secretary, has been to Ontario on at least five occasions to look at the successful things we have implemented in the province of Ontario. We've been able to do that because we have one of the most outstanding partnerships with our education professionals in the province of Ontario.

We will continue to move on to deliver excellence in education with the kind of leaders, like the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, who make this happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I have three sons, and I'm really glad they're out of the education system right now—they have trades—so they don't have to watch the performance by this government here.

This is nothing but a manufactured crisis. The teachers were going to co-operate with us, with your government. Instead, you manufactured a crisis in order to win votes in the upcoming by-elections.

Our leader has been very clear that he doesn't want to derail the school year. In fact, the Ontario PC caucus would appreciate no disturbances whatsoever, so that kids can be in the classroom and we can begin to implement somewhat of a wage freeze to get Ontario back on track.

We had two choices: Allow a 5.5% wage increase when the province couldn't afford it, or stop the pay increase for a portion of the public sector, get kids in the classrooms and keep working toward a broader public wage freeze. This is why we will bail Dalton McGuinty out this time.

Your government is out of gas; it's out of wind. This bill is the first recognition by the Ontario Liberal government that their spending is out of control and that the call of our leader, Tim Hudak, for a legislated, province-wide, mandatory broader public sector wage freeze is the right thing to do to get this province back on track.

We value our publicly funded education system, but in order for that public education system to be sustainable, we have to be able to afford it. In Ontario, we have over 114,000 teachers, and in the 2012 budget, the Liberals said that freezing teachers' wages included their salary

grid. It is necessary if government is to meet its commitment to balance the budget. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough—Agincourt has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to thank the members from Cambridge, Beaches—East York, Peterborough and Perth—Wellington for your remarks tonight.

I remind the members opposite that the opposition keeps using the word “crisis,” and the other party keeps talking about by-elections. Our party, our government, is consistently using the words “students,” “learners’ needs” and “supporting our classrooms.” I recall, when I was a young school trustee back in the 1990s, the crisis that the PC government did.

I also want to remind everybody here tonight of the fact that at the end of the day, every school board in Ontario knew since February, when the GSN was released, that they needed to renegotiate their contracts by August 31. So unless they do not know and don’t have a calendar, they still have two more days. We still have two more days to get this done. But our priority has always been the students in the classroom, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that when we have successful students, we all recognize there are also great teachers in the classroom, but teachers alone are not the only support. We also ensure the capital, the infrastructure of schools, that we put enough resources into building and preserving our schools outside of infrastructure. We also worked with the various community partners. I know that, because I was there. We work with the parents; we created a parent council. We fund many of these initiatives. We do the family literacy centres we talked about. We support the after-school programs. We ensure the community is being supported in terms of community use of schools. So classrooms are one aspect, supporting through the teachers, through the learners. But there is a whole gamut of other resources we support as a government towards student success. I just want to remind everybody.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rob Leone: I would like to indicate that I’m sharing my time with the member from Chatham—Kent—Essex.

I read with interest—when I first saw the name of Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, I thought if my email could play the violin it would be very, very sweet and poetic. It reminded me of when I took a gondola ride in Venice and there was a nice serenade that was going on. It was a very sweet moment, because who in their right mind wouldn’t want to be putting students first? I actually think they named the title to get the support of the NDP. I thought it was in the last election they wanted change that put people first: Put people first; put students first. Unfortunately, they didn’t get your support. So I think that’s a hashtag fail, as Jack Layton would say, on the title of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I’m a parent. I have two kids. The reason I’m here is because I want to put my kids first. As an educator, I had thousands of students when I was a professor in university. My colleague from Northumberland—Quinte West is also a teacher. Each and every day we worked, before we came to this place—and even now that we are in this place—and have been putting students first each and every day. Do you know what? When we saw this bill—and unfortunately my email was muted and I didn’t have that serenade—I knew right then and there that my caucus, the Ontario PC caucus, would stand shoulder to shoulder to put our students first. That’s exactly what we’ve been doing.

Unfortunately, the government ceases to remember this gentleman, their Liberal economist by the name of Don Drummond. Don Drummond is a guy who wrote this big report that’s collecting dust in government offices. I know members of the opposition still read it on occasion. Don Drummond said that if we don’t change course, we’re going to run ourselves into a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt. That’s what Don Drummond said—your economist—he said that you’re going on that path.

You know, it’s been said over and over again that if we continue on that path, if our debt-to-GDP ratio increases beyond 50% that we are on course to becoming the Greece of Canada. Fifteen years ago, Greece was facing a similar path, a similar crossroads that we’re facing here in Ontario today. There are two choices: We continue down that path, raise our deficit and shatter our economy; or we can rein in our government spending, encourage private sector job growth and get our province back on track. Much like Greece, that government needs a bailout. They need a bailout from the catastrophe that they’ve made of our province’s finances. That’s the reason we’re here today. This is an education bill, they say, but it’s also a finance bill. They know that they’re going down the wrong track and they need to change course and they need a bailout, much like Greece.

We have long been advocating, since the last election and before, for a mandatory across-the-board public sector wage freeze: a mandatory across-the-board public sector wage freeze. I think folks in the broader public sector understand that we are in a financial mess. We’re not in a financial mess of our doing; we’re in a financial mess of their doing. They’re the ones who got us here. They’re the ones who spent us over a cliff. Again, it’s worth saying: They need a bailout. They need us to help them. They need to see a different path.

Even though this bill is not what we would have wanted, at least it gets them changing their minds, hopefully, about what they actually need, which is an across-the-board public sector wage freeze. This is ultimately a mess of their own making. Every time we look, every time we open the newspaper, it seems another money bomb has been dropped. We look at the \$2.4-billion eHealth fiasco, where four million Ontarians still don’t have electronic medical records. Diabetics in the province of Ontario don’t have their system up and

running. We have the Mississauga gas plant: \$190 million for political expediency. That's why we spent that money, for no other reason than to save Liberal seats. We call it the seat-saver program. It is what it is: another money bomb. Merit pay: 98% of managers get merit pay. We say an across-the-board public sector wage freeze that applies to the managers, just like it applies to the workers, just like it should apply to MPPs and cabinet ministers and parliamentary assistants and so on, right across the board.

They failed to listen to us. They had a bill presented to them by the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London. They don't believe in that; they voted against it. So we are here to bail them out.

I was at the debate in K-W on Monday.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob Leone: Of course she did.

You know what? The question of an across-the-board public sector wage freeze came forward, and what did they say? We had the NDP saying that they support a conversation on a public sector wage freeze. What does that mean? They want to talk about it. Well, they can talk about it. We see talk not leading to action often. The Liberal candidate, remarkably, said he is for a public sector wage freeze, but his party doesn't vote for it, so I don't know where they stand really. Only one candidate in that debate, the PC candidate, stood up for a mandatory across-the-board public sector wage freeze that will save \$2 billion from the financial mess that government has put us in.

On my website I have a debt clock. That debt clock stands today at \$263.8 billion: \$263.8 billion. What is that per capita? Over \$20,528. This is about putting students first, as the Liberals like to say. What could students buy with the money and the debt that party added? They could buy 10,498 pencils. They could buy 133 pairs of shoes. They could buy 270 video games. They could buy 348 soccer balls. They could pay for piano lessons, from start to finish. If we were putting kids first, they would balance the budget so they won't put their debt, their mismanagement and their overspending on the backs of our kids.

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This is the crossroads we're at, Mr. Speaker. We believe we have to get to a point where we rein in government spending. It's on that basis, and that basis alone, that we support this bill. We want to see our kids back in class, yes. There is great question whether that was ever in danger. But, more importantly, we want to see the government finally understand that they have to accept the fiscal realities that they put us in, the fiscal realities that have seen debt escalate to epic proportions, a position that no other province is in—only this one—where we have seen more than five years where our unemployment rate is higher than the national average, a jobs crisis—600,000 people out of work; 300,000 manufacturing jobs gone.

If we don't fix our fiscal broken record, we are well on our way to fiscal catastrophe, and it will hurt our kids, it

will hurt our education system and it will hurt our health care system, because we're spending too much money paying for their mistakes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: To my colleague from Cambridge: Thank you very much.

Speaker, I am eager to rise tonight to speak about this particular piece of legislation, the one that has brought us all back from our ridings and our constituents so that we may deal with a particularly pressing issue facing both Ontario and my constituents back in Chatham—Kent—Essex.

I don't think I'm alone in the opinion that the Premier's mess has brought us to this point; I think all of us wanted to get back to our communities and tackle the challenges that confront our constituents, the folks who sent us here. I think each of us was elected because we want to be the ones to solve those challenges face to face. But the summer didn't go as planned. We were called back, as I said, because this government found itself in yet another crisis. First it was a looming fiscal crisis, then it was a jobs crisis, and now it's a labour crisis that threatens the school year for children across the province.

I wonder if this was the strong action that we've heard so much about, because to me it seems like the wrong action, time and time again—action that sent Ontario spiralling into a \$15-billion deficit; action that has kept our unemployment levels higher than the national average; action that saw eight years of bowing to union bosses across the province, of allowing this government to be bullied, yet refusing to anticipate a problem when that approach became unsustainable. The summer didn't go as planned because, quite frankly, this government has only ever had one plan for its problems. I call it plan A, "spend"; there is no plan B.

We've got to be very clear about who is at fault for bringing us to the brink of losing the school year. It's the party opposite. Bill 115 seeks to remedy the situation they have created with a piece of legislation that is two years too late. We have to conduct debate on this legislation with little forward notice. All the while, there was at least one party that was willing to offer a solution that would not only strike a blow against the fiscal downward spiral but would also be an equitable solution for more than simply a crisis in the education sector. That party was the one that I stand with today, the Ontario PC Party, the one that called for an across-the-board public sector wage freeze that would have saved us billions of dollars over the next few years. This, unlike Bill 115, was not a new idea. Bringing public sector salaries in line with private sector realities was something that I talked about personally as I went door to door in my riding last year as part of the Progressive Conservative platform, and I remain proud to stand with that. The members opposite reject the idea out of hand. They rejected it when our leader, Tim Hudak, went before the Premier to help steer the latest budget back into the realm of fiscal sanity, and it was rejected in the leadup to the summer

break, the government understanding all the while what the cost would be of not taking the action we recommended.

The cost would have been two different options, only one slightly more preferable than the other: The teacher unions would have allowed the existing contracts to roll over, thus implementing an unaffordable 5.5% hike, or this government's current plan could be adopted. This is where we find ourselves today: in a position to allow Bill 115 to pass, to allow cost increases for teachers to rocket upward to \$450 million over the next couple of years, despite the economic crisis the party opposite has created, despite all the good ideas that have been proposed and batted away.

I relish none of this. My colleagues and I are here to see that students get an education. They're entitled to that education. The party opposite, particularly the Premier's cabinet, are here for one reason: to save face. I believe that there are members opposite who do not support Bill 115, members who recognize the runaway train in Ontario's finances, and I hope that they will find it within themselves to speak up in the future, urge sanity upon their leaders and not toe the party line.

This is not a perfect bill; far from it. In OECTA alone, nearly 18,000 unionized teachers will continue to move up the salary grid. When this deal is replicated across all school boards, that number will jump to 45,000. In order to see this as anything resembling a wage freeze, you'd have to squint your eyes and tilt your head sideways.

The Liberal government has messed up. Still, they won't fess up after they've messed up and admit that they desperately need help to bail them out of this ugly, unnecessary conflict. But we don't have time for admissions of guilt. Look, the school year is just days away. Ontario creeps closer to a fiscal cliff with every passing moment. Sadly, this bill may bring us even closer to that. But we're going to have to bite down hard, pass this bill and then come back for more. That's what our party intends to do.

There is much more work to be done. It doesn't end today. This is not the finish line; this is just a hurdle in the opening stretch—a hurdle that didn't need to be here, but it is, and we have to deal with it. There are 4,000 outstanding collective agreements yet to be resolved. The Auditor General should perhaps review the minister's fiscal plan and the OECTA memorandum of understanding.

There are yet changes we want to see made to this bill. Our education critic has been working hard to make sure that this bill is accomplishing something in the way of accountability to the parents who send their children to school every day. We want to see principals have the power to hire the best substitute teachers, not just the ones with the most impressive seniority. It's a sad day when the members opposite must push the school year to the very brink of disaster before they will even consider bringing some accountability to our classrooms and to this government, but here we are.

After this is settled, it will be time to press on, to continue to confront the challenges that face us all. I hope that this government will take away some very important lessons from this debacle and will understand that their plan A will no longer be good enough for Ontario.

But wait: Is that a bell I hear? Yes, it is, and this Liberal government has just been schooled. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my two colleagues from the Conservative Party, but in two minutes I only have time to comment on one. I wish to draw my conclusions or my comments to the member from Cambridge, because he's quite an erudite fellow, a professor, a smart man. But he brought in the whole thing that's happening in Greece, and I do have to correct him on behalf of all of my Greek-speaking constituents. They are the second-largest group, after the Chinese-speaking, in my own riding.

I'm very familiar with Greece. Perhaps he should do some research not only on Greece, but on Italy and Spain and Portugal and those countries that are facing the problems. Greece is in the circumstances it is in now because of successive right-wing governments. What they did was they cut taxes and refused to get taxes paid to them. They continued to spend, but they did not collect taxes from the most wealthy people.

At the same time, because Greece had entered into the EU, there was lots of money floating around, money that was coming in from other places for roads and bridges and sewers and the Olympic games and everything else. Things were good and people were spending money. They were spending money they did not have. The government was doing it, which was a right-wing government by the name of New Democracy, and the people of Greece themselves were. But the thing is that Greece is in the situation it is today because it has the least tax revenue of any of the countries that belong to the common market.

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If you look at what is happening in Italy, it's the second-worst case, and you have to look at Berlusconi, who is also a right-wing guy who did the same thing: He cut taxes and made sure that people didn't have to pay them.

If you want to draw those conclusions, you have to get a mirror and look at yourself. Why is it you want to cut taxes to put Canada in the same kind of position that Greece and Italy find themselves in today? Right-wing governments did it and you'll do it too.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to respond to the remarks by the members from Cambridge and Chatham-Kent-Essex. Where I started actually follows right along from the member from Beaches-East York, because both members talked about the provincial deficit. To hear the speeches, you would think this is because the

global recession was somehow the fault of the Ontario government spending on public servants. I beg to differ. What started the global recession was a bunch of private sector bankers in the United States, not the Ontario government spending on public services. So let's get our economic analysis straight to start with.

When we look at that provincial deficit, we recognize we need to have the budget balanced. We did in fact ask the retired chief economist of the Toronto-Dominion Bank for some advice. When it came to the education sector, the advice he gave us was to cancel full-day kindergarten, to lay off 20,000 young, junior teachers, to lay off 10,000 education support workers. And, yes, that chapter of the report is collecting dust, because we said we're not going to do that. We are going to protect full-day kindergarten; we are going to protect those young teachers' jobs; we are going to protect those education support workers' jobs. But in return for that, we do need to hit the pause button on education sector compensation.

We have successfully negotiated with the English Catholic teachers, with the French teachers. We have not concluded agreements—which the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex accurately said would roll over. We have not completed those agreements, so we need this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: As a former educator myself, I find this debate quite interesting. The Liberals want to come across as the only ones who care about students. What my esteemed colleague from Cambridge alluded to earlier is that he and I both come from those institutions that nurture the most important resource this province has. So don't give us the flowery title of Putting Students First, right? We put students first as well.

Mr. Leone alluded to his children. I have two young daughters. We want to make sure that they receive the best education they can get.

This Liberal government has failed the education system in this province, and that's why I'm here tonight. They've lowered the bar so far. They haven't done the right things when it comes to ensuring that the young generation of this province has the right tools to meet the requirements for the global economy of the 21st century.

We need to stand up and make it clear that we do care about students. The NDP cares about students. The NDP have made it very clear that they care about students. The Liberals here are playing games. The by-election is coming up. This is just a tactic so that they can look good for those people who support them: their former union bosses that they love so much. It's not about the students; it's about the by-election. So I take offence, as do Mr. Leone and my colleagues here, when they think they're the only ones fighting for the students here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have to say that we're probably going to vote differently on this bill in regard to the outcome, but we do agree on one point, and that is:

Really, this is about the politics of the by-elections. Let's call it what it is. I've spoken to all of the school boards in my area, plus some. Not one of the school boards has told me that they were going to lock teachers out. I spoke to the teachers' affiliate associations across my riding provincially. None of them have said that they're prepared to go out. In fact, they said that they're prepared to do a wage freeze. So it seems to me that there are the makings of getting a deal here between the school boards and the ones representing the teachers, and the only one who seems to be getting in the way is the government. This is really about the government trying to ratchet up a crisis so they can say, "Oh, everybody be afraid. There's going to be a lockout. There's going to be something, and we have to be really tough and fix the problem." The reality is that you're the ones who are the problem; you're the ones who are creating the crisis. I think this is rather regrettable. Here we are doing this. Why? Not because we want to put kids first; it's because, quite frankly, the government wants to put seats in the Legislature first. I think that particular line used earlier in question period by Andrea Horwath was exactly right.

I just say to my friends across the way: I think we all have the same objective. We want to make sure that our kids are in the classroom; we want to make sure that we manage the expenses of this province responsibly, that we live within our means. If we look at the platforms of the last provincial election, Andrea Horwath, along with others, said the same thing: We recognize that there's a deficit and that we have to manage that. But this, my friends, has little to do with managing the deficit; it has little to do with making sure that kids are in the classroom; it has a whole bunch to do with having to make sure that they can try to get more seats through a by-election so they can contrive a win where one, I think, will be fairly difficult for them to get.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Cambridge has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rob Leone: I would like to thank the member for Beaches-East York, the member for Guelph, the member for Northumberland-Quinte West and the member for Timmins-James Bay.

I took the comments from the member for Beaches-East York seriously. I think it actually reveals the differences between the PCs and the NDP quite well. I'm not going to defend the governments of Greece or Italy. I think, by your comments, if I can make an inference—I don't mean to make an inference on your behalf—that you believe that there is a revenue crisis in those countries. I happen to believe there's a spending crisis in those countries. That is the reason; that's the comparative that we're talking about here. We are talking about too much money being spent and not enough money being taken in.

The province of Ontario has a spending crisis. We're spending billions upon billions of dollars more in the province of Ontario than we did even at the depths of this recession. I think it's \$20 billion more than in 2008. This one-time stimulus was never one-time. We've had it and

we've added to it. That's the reality in the province of Ontario.

All the while, Mr. Speaker, we're now collecting \$3 billion in equalization payments that we didn't have before. The reality of it is that we are now a have-not province. The only party that's responsible for that is the party that likes to take all the credit for whatever thing they can find but never any of the blame—all of the credit; none of the blame. They should get all of the blame and all of the shame for the position they put this province in, which is so bad that we need drastic change to get our province back to become the leader it should be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings to announce that there have been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader indicates otherwise.

Hon. John Milloy: No further debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The debate is deemed adjourned.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'll call for orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Agreed?

All those in favour? All those opposed?

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Am I to conclude that this is the end of the second reading debate on Bill 115?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, you're not. That's the end of that point of order.

This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 2120.

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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
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Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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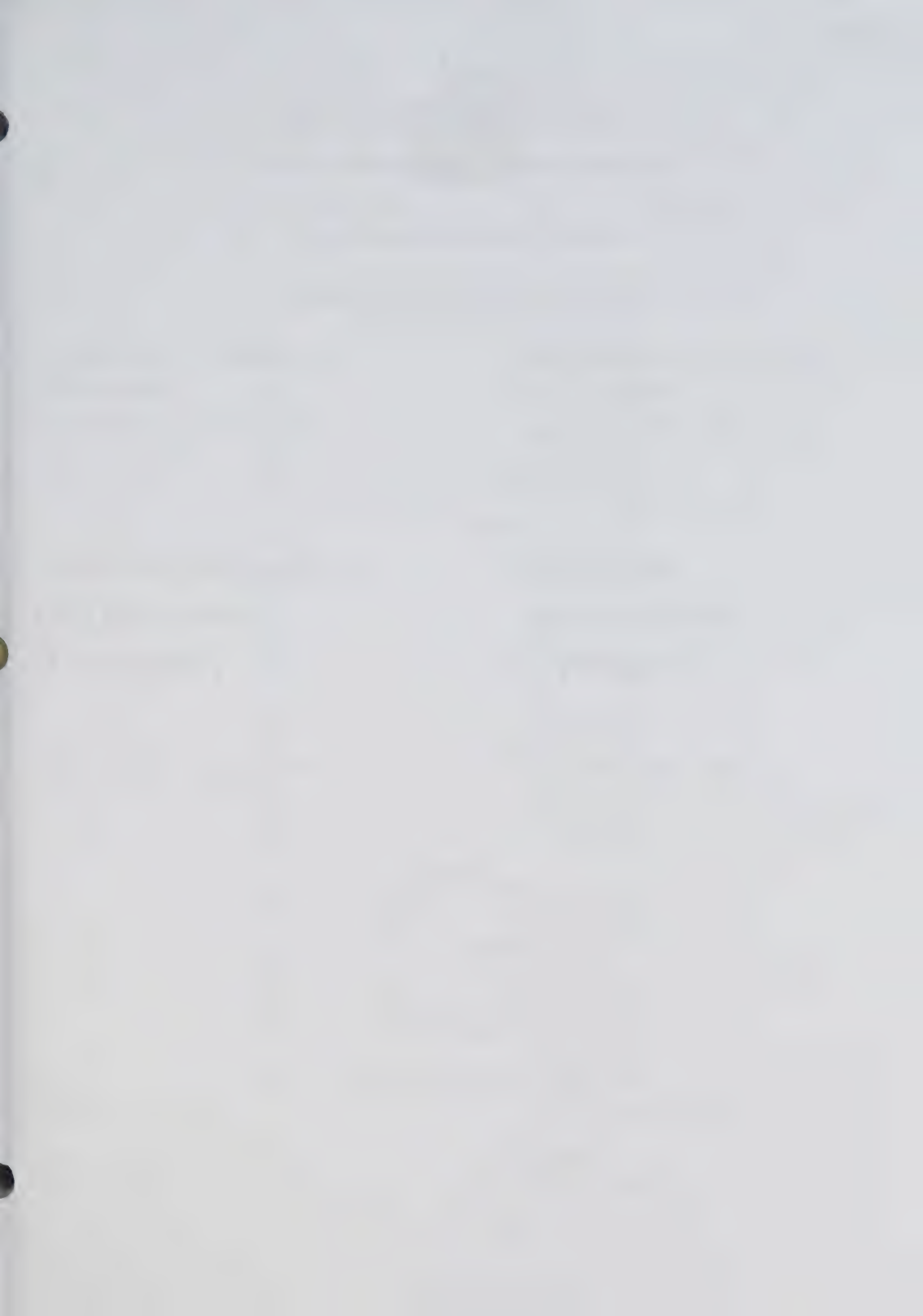
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First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 30 August 2012

Jeudi 30 août 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 August 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 août 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Let us pray.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 29, 2012, on the amendment to the motion by Ms. Broten relating to the government's commitment to the full-day kindergarten program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Ottawa—Orléans—no, Nepean—Carleton; sorry.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They've been asking in Ottawa—Orléans for me to move over there, Speaker, so they can get a more effective representative. Thank you very much. It is my pleasure.

I was thinking on my way to the House today how the Liberals must enjoy me this week, because they've given me the opportunity to stand up and speak in this House at length each and every day this week, and I can say from the bottom of my heart: I missed you too this summer, and thanks very much for bringing me back a week early.

We did some reading yesterday from our friend Don Drummond, the hand-picked economic adviser.

Mr. Jeff Leal: How was the game?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I didn't get to go. Thanks very much for keeping me here last night; I appreciated that. Being the education critic and a person with a private member's bill this week, I haven't had a lot of sleep. But I have had a lot of time to think about this motion before us, this motion that is non-binding and only designed to trick people into thinking that they actually, actually care.

We talked at length yesterday about Don Drummond, the chief economic adviser of the McGuinty Liberals, who was the architect and the brainchild behind the greedy \$3-billion HST tax grab before the last election. He, of course, reported in February this year to say—and I must remind everyone, because there are some new members in the assembly today who weren't here yesterday—and this is the critical point, on page 213:

"Given the current fiscal climate, the commission is concerned that the timing is not appropriate for a new program with a cost of this magnitude. The costs of FDK were incorporated into the March 2011 budget and the 2011 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review in

November. But as we have discussed elsewhere, not enough offsetting restraint was secured in other spending to ensure that these fiscal plans would achieve the overall ... objective."

Speaker, that isn't the only Liberal who had concerns with the government's plan. You'll probably recall the Scarborough Observer on September 22, 2007. Now, this is an interesting quote. It's in the article. It is written by Tianpei Ma. I'm going to quote directly from the article:

"The same debate is happening over early childhood education. While most candidates support the proposed suggestion to change kindergarten classes from a half day to a full day, Balkissoon suggests any party agreeing with the initiative should make sure they have the revenue first."

So a Liberal MPP, in September 2007, two provincial elections ago, stood and told the voters of Ontario that only if the province of Ontario could afford to pay for full-day kindergarten—that is only when they could proceed.

I now have two Ontario Liberals on record: the chief economic adviser to Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan—

Interjection: The Liberal economist.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That will be the Liberal economist Don Drummond, the architect of the \$3-billion HST tax grab, and now Bas Balkissoon, who is a member of the Legislative Assembly for the Liberal caucus. He too agreed with Dalton McGuinty's hand-picked economic adviser who said we must be cautious. That, sir, is why we have put forward an amendment to this legislation.

They have to be truthful with the taxpayers of Ontario. Can we afford it or can we not? We went through this yesterday at great length. We went through at great length the challenges we are facing in Ontario given the economic mismanagement of the decade of darkness.

For the past nine years, this Liberal government has spent us into oblivion. They have taxed the families of this province so that there is not a lot of affordability in their own communities.

Now, how does that impact full-day learning in Ontario? Quite simply, it talks about the sustainability of the entire public education system if there is no money in the kitty. And I can tell you something, Speaker. Given the fact that they have taken Ontario from first to worst in economic growth, given the fact that they have tripled Ontario's debt in a very short period of time, and given the fact that their high energy prices have driven manufacturing jobs out of our province, it is becoming more difficult to pay for core education, not to mention full-day learning, as I cite Mr. Balkissoon.

I say once again, “While most candidates support the proposed suggestion to change kindergarten classes from a half day to a full day, Balkissoon suggests any party agreeing with the initiative should make sure they have the revenue first.”

Well, Speaker, we know that this government is on its way to a \$30-billion deficit. There is no money. Don't take my word for it. Take their own hand-picked economic adviser's word for it, Don Drummond. He says so in his commission, the commission appointed by this government. He said if they don't get spending under control and they don't find some offsets of a \$1.2-billion price tag, we're going to find ourselves in a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt.

I ask my colleagues, is that the responsible way to spend the next generation's money? Is it? I ask the assembly, is that the right thing to do in order to suffer the next generation and burden them with a debt and deficit that they did not create? Don Drummond doesn't think so. Don Drummond—and there's actually a larger report here, Speaker, that I quoted from extensively, as you'll see, the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. Don Drummond goes to great length. That's why I made an amendment to the frivolous motion put forward by the government to expand on what our concerns are in the official opposition.

I'm just going to recap, because the problem with the debate that starts on one day and goes on to the next, through the speech of one member, is sometimes it gets lost in translation, particularly for the government and especially those members who may not have been here before 2007.

So we amended their motion yesterday, and what we're debating now—I want them to be very clear on this—is to ensure that the new cost of this program does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit and lead to the tripling of Ontario's debt, so the House requires the government to ask the AG to report on the program's new costs and the ministry's corresponding savings to pay for them to ensure the Liberal government's nine years of overspending does not jeopardize the things we care about, like front-line health care and classroom education.

0910

Let's go back to this: “does not further increase Ontario's structural deficit.” This is a government that inherited the good days. This economy, this province was booming. People were coming here from all around the world. They decided they wanted to set up here in Ontario, move here, raise a family here, get a job here, retire here. They were spending money here. That stopped. That stopped when they took power, and they're on course to creating and they have created—they're going to triple the debt, but at the same time they're creating a structural deficit because they are spending more money every year than they take in.

Don Drummond said two things: “One, you're either going to have to raise taxes, which I'm not allowed to recommend, or two, you're going to have to cut all these

programs.” If you don't have the courage, if you don't have the ability, if you don't have the strength of character, if you don't have the leadership to make these decisions, then you're going to have to find offsets elsewhere, and that's what we're asking for. Where are the offsets?

I think I speak in the spirit of my Liberal colleague Bas Balkissoon in suggesting that if you're going to go through with the initiative, you should have the revenue first. Who here, Speaker, goes shopping when they have a dime in their pocket? That's what this government does. I mean, this is the shiny bauble trinket and excitable government, over next door. The reality is that no one is arguing with the education system here; we're arguing about ability to pay and the affordability and ensuring that the next generation doesn't have to pay for the mistakes of this government. We've been asking for that forever. I would humbly submit that in this Toronto Observer article for Scarborough, my colleague Bas Balkissoon suggests the same thing.

There hasn't been an opportunity today, or yesterday in the last hour, for me to indicate any of my own personal views or beliefs on this subject, because it has been so clear that there is such debate going on in the Liberal Party over this matter that we simply have to expose where the government is. They don't know, so we have to continue to bring it up, that their own hand-picked economic adviser, the person that they rely on to ensure that the trains run on time with this government, so that there's enough money for them to pay their buddies over at Courtyard, at eHealth, and ensure that all the big managers get their big bonuses in a time of restraint—and so that they can ensure that when Deb Matthews wants to go take her Ornge helicopter with Chris Mazza, there's fuel in the tank even though there isn't when it's needed for patients. But, Speaker, the reality is that they've got Don Drummond and Bas Balkissoon telling this assembly and telling the people of Ontario, “Hold on. We have to make sure we have the revenue first.”

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Mississauga.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. The member, in her zeal to make her point, has consistently violated a standing practice of the House, which is not to name members but to refer to members by their riding name.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga—Streetsville does have a point, and I would advise the member for Nepean—Carleton—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that. I'm simply—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Just a second—to refer to other members of the House by their riding name, not by their proper name.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Okay, Speaker. Thank you. I have 30 seconds left. I just want to just say this: I have an article that I was quoting from that actually mentions Mr. Balkissoon, because it says, “Balkissoon suggests any

party agreeing with the initiative should make sure they have the revenue first.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you, but again I'll caution the member that you have to talk about the riding name, not the member's name, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The newspaper doesn't identify this individual that way.

I'd just like to say thank you. I have had a great opportunity here over the past hour to point out the flaws in the government's fiscal plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say at the outset that I'm obviously not going to speak against the motion, and I'm obviously going to be voting, and our caucus will be voting, with this motion in the end, because we've believed for a long time that full-time JK and K are important. In fact, where I come from in Timmins, we've been doing it long before the government ever thought about it. We've been doing this for the better part of 20 years. My kids went to full-time kindergarten, and I think our youngest daughter went to full-time JK and she's 29 years old now with her own daughter now, Ellisa, my granddaughter. Do you want to see pictures?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'll show you pictures. Don't get me going. I've got to tell a funny story about pictures if you'd allow me, Mr. Speaker.

The other day, my second granddaughter, who is 18 months old, was with her dad watching television. They were watching the news of the rally outside, of the teachers sort of gathering together and protesting this government's actions in regard to the bill they have before the House. Some woman on the television—you've got to remember that my granddaughter Victoria speaks, at this point, one-word sentences. It's all in French: en haut, en bas, papa, maman—you know, that kind of stuff. She doesn't speak in anything more than one-word sentences. This woman gets on TV and she says, “Dalton McGuinty's a bad man,” at which point my granddaughter grabs a Batman figurine and says, “Dalton McGuinty Batman.” I thought it was hilarious. Anyway, the Premier said he was thankful that somebody thought he was a superhero, but that's a whole other story. Anyway, let me get to the motion.

We, as New Democrats, have always said that we believe it's an important part of social policy and also an important thing for kids that we have full-time kindergarten and JK. So I'm not going to spend all of my time talking about the actual policy because, in fact, we voted on this some time ago. This House pronounced itself on this particular issue some time ago. The government made the announcement that is now being implemented, and it begs the question why we're having this debate. Why is it important, all of a sudden, that we have this debate? They've called the Legislature back because, supposedly, there's a crisis in education

somewhere. Nobody seems to figure out, except the Liberals, that there is a crisis.

Why are we having this particular debate? Well, I would think we're having this particular debate because the government is more preoccupied about by-elections than they are about really doing what needs to be done in this Legislature. They've manufactured this crisis in education in order to say, “Oh my God, if we don't take action, there's going to be disruption in the classroom. It's going to be terrible. Kids won't go to school. The lights will go out in the schoolrooms. Look at those teachers, what they're doing.”

They're just trying to create a crisis, and everybody in Ontario is sort of standing back and saying, “Where the heck's the crisis?”

What have we heard so far? We've heard that the teachers started—their opening position in bargaining—by saying, “We'll take a two-year wage freeze.” My God, I've been negotiating for years on the union and on the employer side, and I've got to tell you, from the employer side, that if my employees come to me and say, “I'm prepared to take a two-year wage freeze,” that's a pretty big start toward getting a settlement when it comes to negotiation.

I say to myself, “Oh, the government wasn't happy with that,” so they decided, “Well, how can we win a by-election if we don't find some way to get voters all excited and mad about something where we could be seen as doing something for them?” So they decided to contrive this crisis. Then the government says, “It's really important. We've got to get the House back, because we have to deal with this crisis. Oh, my God, if we don't deal with this crisis, the world's going to come to an end.” So they take the extraordinary step of calling the House back early by two weeks, starting last Monday.

The government also says, “Not only do we have a crisis in education, but the bad old opposition is holding up this important legislation that we have on the order paper to pass through the House.” The government says, “We're not going to have a debate on bills that are on the order paper.”

There are a number of bills that probably could be finished, done and wrapped up in this House if the government was just to call them. For example, the government's got Bill 2, which is the seniors' tax credit. Wow, if the government would have called that this morning, a bill that they say, “Oh Lord, it's so important. We've got to get bills through the House and the opposition is holding us up. Oh my God, that terrible opposition. This minority Parliament can't work,” they're saying to the voters in the by-elections.

Well, if they're thinking that minority Parliament doesn't work, why didn't they just call that bill? They probably would have got it. I know we're done speaking to it. I can't speak for the Conservative caucus, but I think they're finished speaking to it. The only ones who are filibustering Bill 2 at this point is the government themselves by introducing this motion to talk about something that was decided over two years ago.

0920

Mr. Speaker, what's going on here? This is simple politics. This is a government that is so preoccupied with two by-elections that they're prepared to call the House back, create a crisis in education, and make it look as if there's some sort of a crisis and paralysis in the Legislature. God, they're filibustering themselves. Mr. Speaker, I object. They're trying to take away the role of the opposition by the government being oppositional to themselves.

What is going on here? The world is turning upside down. You have the opposition saying there are some important issues that need to be dealt with. Andrea Horwath gets up in the House and says, "Listen, we have a job crisis in this province." There are people in communities across Ontario, from Sault Ste. Marie to, yes, Waterloo, Vaughan, Toronto and a whole bunch of other cities that are looking for work. And what are they doing? They're not dealing with, "Let's look at what we can do to help people when it comes to the economy." We're sitting here talking about a motion that will have no effect on public policy because the vote was done two years ago and the funding has been put out the door to already start up full-time JK and senior kindergarten.

Why aren't we talking about the issues that are going on in Essex and London and Hamilton and Toronto, where people across this province are saying there is a jobs crisis? You have people that are afraid that they're going to lose their jobs. You have people that are feeling as if they're falling further and further behind because of the burden that this government has imposed on them with things like the HST and other measures like high hydro rates, where people are feeling the squeeze and people are saying, "I want some solutions brought to these problems."

No, the government doesn't in a by-election say, "We're going to roll up our sleeves and, as the government, we're going to show the way and provide leadership in order to make this province prosperous again and to give people the feeling that they can actually make ends meet at the end of the day and a little bit more security when it comes to having a job." Oh, no: "We're going to negotiate something that's earth-shattering, something that we decided two years ago."

What's this place all about, Mr. Speaker? Like I said, imagine that: a government filibustering itself. I think it proves what we have been saying from this side of the House for the last couple of weeks. This government is more preoccupied in their own self-interest of being able to win by-elections—contrive to create by-elections—so that they can hopefully try to get a majority in the House. And God protect us if they get a majority in the House.

We've had two terms of majority Liberal government. We know what that gave us. Let's remind ourselves what we got. We got the HST; we got ourselves higher interest rates. We now have the highest deficit numbers that we've ever had in the history of the province of Ontario; no plan really to deal with it in a progressive way. The only response the government has to balancing the

budget is, "Let's run over the working people. Let's just hack away at things," and do essentially what right-wing governments have been doing across this province.

My learned friend wants to say something.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd actually like to accept some advice from the member for Timmins—James Bay and ask for unanimous consent to revert to third reading of Bill 2.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I heard a no, and I return to the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: For the record, Mr. Speaker, I said yes. I'm perfectly willing to deal with those bills that are important to the people of Ontario.

Now, here's the beauty of the Legislature. This is why Parliament can work. This is why minority Parliaments can work. So now here I am, a lowly little MPP from Timmins—James Bay, standing up in the Legislature making the point, and the government is now starting to say, "Oh, God. He's beating us up and he's right. People are seeing through our veneer of silliness of trying to make it look as if there's a crisis, and in fact there isn't one. And he's right: There are important things that we should do."

So now we have the government getting up and saying unanimous consent to revert to passing Bill 2, which is the senior home tax credit, which I'm in favour of and I would vote for and I would agree to unanimous consent. But I think it proves the point that I've been making: This government is so intent on—how would I say it nicely? They're so intent on feather-bedding their own chances in the next by-elections that they're prepared to resort to anything, except doing what's right, in order to win those particular elections.

I come back to the point. I look at people across this province; I look at people in my own constituency. What are they concerned about? They're concerned about being able to make ends meet at the end of the day. People open their hydro bills every month and they say, "Oh, my God. Look, Gilles; look how much I'm paying. I'm paying almost double what I used to before Mr. McGuinty came to power." I'm sure other members are getting that, in Essex, in Hamilton and other places on a regular basis, where they're saying, "This is crazy."

We had, in the city of Timmins, Xstrata metals, which operated a refinery smelter in Timmins for a number of years—a state-of-the-art facility, one that was making money. Why did they close down? I was at the meetings along with the Premier, along with the mayor of the city of Timmins, Mr. Lewenza from the CAW, and others. They flatly told the Premier, square, head-on, "We're leaving Ontario because we can't afford the electricity rates in this province." So they closed down a facility that had almost 900 people working there and moved production to Quebec. Why? Because the Quebec government understands that cheap electricity prices—because they have the ability of producing such electricity

because of hydroelectric—is an economic development tool, and if you want to develop your economy, you have to do things that are important, leading to a lower bottom line, for those companies to establish and stay in your own jurisdiction. This government says no; the only way they're going to do that is by following a right-wing agenda of austerity and lowering taxes.

I've got to tell you: There's another way. New Democrats, social democrats, have been saying for a long time that there's a better way. There's a balanced approach to how you balance the budget. Yes, you must keep an eye on the bottom line. Yes, you must be frugal in your expenses. Yes, you must make sure that you're extremely efficient in how you spend taxpayer money on things like education, on health care, on plowing your highways. But there are other things you can do. You can look at the revenue side—and that doesn't mean raising taxes; that means building a stronger economy that generates more revenue because there's more activity in the economy.

The reality is that if you look at it—and this is interesting. If people want to do a little bit of reading—and I'm sure all of us in this House have, but for the people listening or reading this debate, go and read what some of the economists are saying about the austerity measures that are now taking place across the world as a result of a response by right-wing governments like Mr. McGuinty's and Mr. Harper's. It leads to slower economic growth. It leads to a slowdown in the economy.

One of the really interesting articles I read recently—and I forget what magazine it was online. Some economist wrote an article; I think he was Portuguese. He made a very good point. He said that if everybody was to go into the mode of saving, you would actually kill the economy because that would mean to say that nobody is spending and people are putting their money away. You have to have people spending money in an economy. So when governments are doing things that lead to austerity, they're in fact slowing the economy down.

There is another way. You have to have a balanced approach. Yes, you have to be careful on the expense side; nobody argues. Social democrats will argue—and they've done this in Europe; they've done this in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and other places—that you have to manage your expenses well. But you also have to look at other things. You have to take a look at, “What can I do to help my economy grow?” What can you do to help the auto sector in the Essex-Windsor area remain strong and competitive so that we can keep those jobs from going to Mexico and the United States? What can you do in London to stop companies like Caterpillar from doing what they did, where they essentially said, “My way or the highway,” and the government stood back and said, “That's fine. We're a right-to-work state. If you want to basically strip everything that workers have worked for for their entire lives, it's okay by us”? The government should have stood up and said, “That's not the Ontario we believe in. We believe that we have to help you with your costs, Mr. and Mrs. Caterpillar, but at the end of the day, you're not going to, all of a sudden,

try to take your savings on the back of the community and on the backs of the workers that rely on the jobs in that company.”

You have to have a balanced approach. You have to grow your economy. You do that how? By having good economic development policies, in that you do things such as cheaper electricity prices, so that companies like Xstrata don't move away from places like Timmins, and cheaper electricity prices, so Cliffs Natural Resources really will one day build a refinery in Nickel Belt. I fear that's not going to happen, and I hope that's not the case. I really fear that we'll be in a position where it will never happen, because Cliffs Resources, I'm told, is now in discussions with the government to get a ministerial permit to exempt them from processing ore out of the Ring of Fire in Canada. They want to ship it to China. Why? Because I think there isn't an agreement between the government and Cliffs to lower energy prices to the degree they need to make that particular facility work in Nickel Belt. I think that's unfortunate.

0930

I know that if we were government, we would be rolling up our sleeves and sitting down, not only with Cliffs Resources, but I'd be sitting down with KWG, I'd be sitting down with Noront, I'd be sitting down with First Nations and saying, all right, how do we build this resource and position it in such a way that, yes, mining takes place, that First Nations feel they're real partners and get some economic activity and some profit out of this, that the companies are able to make money, that workers are able to get great wages, that we're able to protect the environment and do what's right and, more important, add value to the chromite that's coming out of that mining area?

So far, the only thing the government is really excited about is the mining jobs. Well, that's only about 30% of what that ore can give Ontario. If you build a refinery, you have value-added jobs. The government says they're interested in doing that. I doubt it's going to happen. But you say to yourself, what do you do with chromite? You eventually make stainless steel out of it. Why not talk to the people in Sault Ste. Marie and Hamilton, where the steel mills now exist, and ask whether there is a possibility of figuring out how we can position those companies to get into the stainless steel business to increase production of stainless steel in Canada for export. Those are the kinds of things you do to grow an economy so you don't have a deficit. And then small businesses in those communities, like Essex and Timmins and London and Sudbury, can go out and can become more prosperous by offering services to those particular companies that are doing that value-added. It means the restaurants are fuller. It means the clothing stores sell more clothes. It means there's more activity. Everybody benefits, and that's how the government grows the revenue.

But this government's approach is, “Oh, my God. The only way we can deal with this is by austerity.” Now we've got the Premier saying, “Maybe we should take sick time away from police officers and firefighters.” Oh,

my God. Remember the last election? They were like the defenders of the police and the firefighters. Now they're saying they want to take away their sick days because they're unaffordable. Is that a response for how you balance the budget? "The only way I can balance the budget is to go to a worker and say I want to take more away." But it's okay to give managers raises; you can give them big bonuses. I'm proud to say that today Andrea Horwath and our caucus will be introducing legislation to deal with that issue. It's patently unfair when workers who are working hard to do the work they're asked to do and being paid whatever it is they're getting and are saying, "We're prepared to take a two-year wage freeze," look at managers getting 3%, 5%, 6% and 10% increases because of bonuses. This government's got a very funny approach, a very, very funny approach to what they think is fair.

I go back to my main point. My main point is, why are we debating a motion that deals with something that was passed in this House two years ago and is now public policy in the province, to which the Liberals and New Democrats already agreed? We're on the same page when it comes to wanting to have full-day kindergarten and JK. Why aren't we debating legislation that deals with fairer electricity prices? Why are we not dealing with ideas such as have been brought forward by my leader, Andrea Horwath, that say we should at least on the tax side give tax cuts only to those companies that are creating jobs and send a very clear message.

If you are serious about investing in Ontario and you want to be a partner in Ontario to grow our economy, we're there with you, social democrats say, Andrea Horwath and others. We're with you. We are going to work hand in hand with you to grow that economy. No. The only thing the government can say is, "We're essentially going to try to create a crisis in education and show there's some sort of paralysis in the House, when there isn't one, so we can game it and maybe be a little more successful politically in the by-elections in Vaughan and Waterloo."

I hope that doesn't work, because I think that will add to people's cynicism when it comes to politics. If you look at the participation rates of people who don't vote in elections nowadays, there's more people that don't vote than do vote. In the last provincial election—I may be wrong, and maybe I'll be corrected on this—in my riding there was a 49% participation rate. That means that more than half of the people didn't vote. I think there are a couple of reasons that is. One is that they look at actions such as what's going on in the Legislature today and say, "Rather than the government working hard to resolve the problems I'm concerned about, the government's more concerned about their own political problem and are creating a kerfuffle to try to maybe game the election to their favour." They say, "Well, the heck with it. I'm checking out. I don't want nothing to do with this." I say to those voters that you're wrong. You should punish those who do that. You should be voting in greater numbers and saying, "I'll show you for doing that. I'm

going to vote against you and I'm going to vote for somebody who has a positive message," whoever that might be. I hope it's us. I think as New Democrats we have a very positive message. But that's what voters should be doing. Voters shouldn't be checking out; they should be checking in.

Look at what's going on in Quebec with Mr. Charest and what happened with the les manifestants that we saw in Quebec over the last number of months in regard to what's going on with tuition in Quebec. Now, agree or disagree with the policy Mr. Charest put forward—I think lower tuition rates tend to make more sense, but that's a whole other argument—but there is a participation in the Quebec election on the part of young people that we have never seen before. They have all of a sudden equated political—civil disobedience or civil action on the streets is one thing, but you make the real change at the ballot box. So you're seeing a lot of young people getting involved in these elections and doing what they can to assist candidates who believe in the issues that they believe in. It's predicted that this particular general election in Quebec coming up—is it this week or next week?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Next week.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Next week. There's going to be a larger participation of youth in that election, and I think that's a breath of fresh air.

I say to those people who are taking the time to pay attention to this debate that you don't check out of politics when you're mad at the politicians; you check in, and you let your feelings be known by way of your choice on the ballot. That's how you do it.

What a wonderful tool we have in our democracy. Always remember what's going on in Afghanistan, what's going on in Egypt, what's going on in Iraq, what's going on in Syria and other places. People in those countries, in order to have a say, literally have guns in their hands. That's an awful thing, when society turns on itself, when citizens pick up the gun against their government and the government picks up guns against the people. It's a terrible thing. Here in Canada, we're so lucky, along with Europe and the United States and other countries. We essentially have those fights at the ballot box.

I say to those people who are disenfranchised and those people who are upset about what's going on in politics, don't check out; check in. Do what's going on in the Middle East. Have your own sort of uprising, but make it at the ballot box. That's where you've got to make the changes.

Again, I'm looking at my colleague here. Did he want to speak to this?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I wouldn't mind helping you.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, okay. All right. You were looking at me very intently.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no. I was listening intently.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, very good. See? Notice how as social democrats we work together. It's like sharing.

It's a very wonderful concept that people across Ontario should take hold of. You get far more from people banding together and sharing ideas and sharing the load and sharing the work. You get a much better result in the end, I think.

I've got a few minutes, and I'm going to let my colleague take—I asked my colleague just before I got up. Madame Gélinas would also like to share in this, so we keep that in mind.

I want to end on this note, because my colleague would like—I want to be clear. I can share my time with my colleague over here, right?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You can share your time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Very good. I just want to be clear that we don't lose the floor.

I want to end on this point: There are very serious issues facing this province: the economy, jobs and affordability. That's what people are concerned about. When the government contrives to make a crisis by saying Parliament doesn't work—"It's slower than molasses," says the government House leader—and the government filibusters their own bills by bringing in a motion like they did this morning, I think it's pretty disingenuous. I think it proves what Andrea Horwath has been saying from the beginning, that this government is more worried about the results of a by-election than they are about doing what's right for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I know my good friend from Trinity–Spadina would like to say a few words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much, and I recognize the member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I thank my friend from Timmins–James Bay for allowing me to complement his remarks and allowing me to speak against—not speaking against the motion, because we supported it when it came forward. But to reannounce an announcement that has already been approved is silly, and it's part of what I call puerile politics. You look bad. You do look bad when you do this, because what it means is you have nothing to say about the current bill and you need another distraction away from this, and actually why you need this motion is to try to embarrass the Tories. I understand that.

0940

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are they embarrassing the Tories?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They're trying; they're trying real hard. That's why I call it puerile politics, because we know where the Conservatives overall stand on this issue—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: With Dalton McGuinty.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: With Dalton McGuinty, indeed. But to do this is, in my mind, a very silly distraction away from other issues.

We pointed out a couple of years back that if you're going to do full-time JK and full-time SK, you're going to have to protect the child care centres with support, with money, because if you take the four- and five-year-

olds out of those child care centres, the very children who provide—not the children who pay, but the families who pay for the four- and five-year-olds. When you take that money out of child care centres, they're no longer viable. We pointed that out from the very beginning, and I recall not one Liberal agreeing with what I was saying—not one Liberal; not one. I usually lift my finger to say, "Is there not one among you; not one?" And it has clearly been shown that many of the child care centres across Ontario are in trouble. Indeed, 450 child care centres have closed as a result of this initiative, an initiative which I supported, which New Democrats supported.

You cannot introduce such initiatives without government funding. And then to do it on the backs of everyone else, and in particular, in this instance, the teachers, whom you are attacking—because what you're saying to teachers is this: "If you don't take these cutbacks in all the areas that have been mentioned that have not been negotiated with most of the federations, we won't be able to afford the full-time JK and SK." I didn't think that was part of the deal that they signed on to three years back. I thought that you, the government, had the money to do this, or that at least you would be able to find it. But you don't find it by attacking other middle-class workers; it's just not the way to do it.

I remember arguing in committee that you needed to put a cap on those JK and SK classrooms, because your average is 27 students. I said, "If that's your average, they're going to go up to 30, 31, 32 or 33, with one education worker and one teacher in that classroom. When that education worker is taken out of the classroom, because so many children have so many needs at any one time, that teacher is alone with those four- and five-year-olds." We argued that that's just not a good thing, it's not a good policy, but did I hear but one Liberal stand up and say, "Marchese is on the right track"? No; not one Liberal. Most of the time there is not one Liberal who will support you, except Kim Craiton, who walked with the teachers a couple of days back—God bless.

We did raise the concerns in committee. We said, "Full-time JK and full-time SK is a wonderful program." It's good for families. It's good for mothers in particular, the mothers who have the biggest burden of raising the children. They know it and we know it, and that's why we thought the initiative was good. But you cannot do it without adequate funding, and we knew that boards across Ontario—Catholic and public—would suffer as a result, because if you don't put in adequate funding, those boards are going to have to rob Peter to pay Paul, and that's what they did.

The sad thing is that the majority of people simply don't see these things as they are happening. We're all so happy about the new initiative. The Liberals: Good God, I don't know how many times they went out saying how great this is, without once mentioning the potential problems that needed to be addressed.

We argued for transitional funding, and the government finally, after many years, put \$65 million, but that was to continue the child care programming dollars that

the federal government stopped funding. It was not to provide for the support of this new initiative that you introduced.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Member from York, we raised this issue with you and others, and not one Liberal listened to what we had to say. And now, lo and behold, you have soldier MPP Liberal backbenchers standing up saying how much they love this program, how much they love these teachers.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: He didn't say that. He's not against full-day kindergarten.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Who?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And now they're standing up talking about how great this program is and, "Good God, if we don't do this to the teachers, if we don't whack them good, as we're trying to whack them good, if we don't distance ourselves from these unions and if we don't take what we can from them, we won't be able to fund JK and SK." So all of a sudden, where you had this education Premier—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Hold on; whoa, Bob. Where you have this education Premier, once so loved, who could walk on water with teachers—I say that biblically. As I said last night, he can no longer walk on water. He has caused a split—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Hold on. I've got to shout over his voice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to refrain from heckling the member for Trinity-Spadina, and I return to the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you, Speaker, for your intervention, because I have to shout over his voice. It's not helpful.

You had an education Premier so much loved by the teachers. They were one. They were tight. Liberal teachers loved him. And all of a sudden that love is just gone. It's no longer mutual. Now we whack teachers as we claim we love them. Every MPP who stands up every day talks about how much they love those teachers and how great our educational system is. But now the time has come to beat up on those people, and the language the Liberals use is, "We've got to beat up on these unions because they just don't get it. They just don't get it."

We've been arguing, on this side—from my private talks with many federation folks, they were quite happy to negotiate in a friendly-like way, literally giving all that you wanted in a collaborative way, and you said no. It's beautiful: You said no. Why is it that you said no? Quite frankly, I just never quite understood it, except for the by-election. And I said, it's got to be. What else could it be? This government is so uneasy about being a minority government, because they've got to work with Tories now; good God. You understand, they've got to work with Tories. They hate that. They do. They hate working

with us, but they hate working with the Tories even more. So they're like yo-yos. They've got to go back and forth, and they are completely confused, politically confused. They don't know quite what to do. They need to win a by-election. The one in Vaughan is relatively safe, but the one in Kitchener-Waterloo is not safe.

So what did they do? They remembered John Snobelen. Do you remember him, Speaker? You were here with me.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: David Cooke, too.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no. John is our man. John is our man on the horse, the giddy-up guy. He's our man on the horse, who had a great idea about creating a crisis. So the Minister of Education said finally, "I need a new bright idea. What do I do? I call up John Snobelen." John said, "Yeah, it worked for me." She said, "Okay, no problemo. It's got to work for me, too."

So they're creating a crisis with teachers. Those Liberals, so much loved by teachers, are no longer loved because the love ain't mutual no more. Those good relations are gone. I'm okay with that, I've got to tell you. I'm okay with that. If you want to beat up on teachers, it's not a political problem of mine, but it has become a political burden for you—a big one. Because what you're doing is attacking those middle-class teachers. You're saying to them, "Your salaries have got to be cut back, because look at the poor private sector on the other side. They're taking a beating too. So if they're taking a beating, you've got to take a beating."

But a couple of months ago, you guys were saying to the corporations, "We're quite happy to give you the public piñata that you could just club away every day," and just pour all that money into their pockets. And they loved it, because they're socking it away—\$500 billion of dead money. Mr. Carney, our big guy, the governor of the Bank of Canada—he's saying that it's dead money.

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You guys, you Tories and you Liberals, have been giving them piles of money out of corporate tax cuts. What do they do? They sock it away. And you've been giving it away—you. Public piñatas, political public piñatas that you just give away to those rich folks, the bankers. Minister of Citizenship, the bankers: You know them well. Instead of sharing the wealth, we give it to the wealthy. How smart is that? Please, how smart is that for you Liberals as you attack the unions these days? I heard the minister of post-secondary education used his attacks on the unions, on the middle-class workers. Yours is an incredible assault on middle-class workers, and it's a terrible assault when they were willing to negotiate with you and willing to do it voluntarily. But no, you had to outdo the Tories, who say, "No, a voluntary wage freeze is not good enough. We need to make sure that we mandate it so that we can tell the public, 'We are tough on them.'" Boy, did you get close to the Tories on this one. Boy, are you outdoing the Tories. Boy, are you so happy to be Tories in a hurry. But it ain't working for you; it ain't working for you. That's the silly thing about what you guys have done.

Now, if you guys survive this one, I say, God bless. Then maybe your strategy of beating up on the middle class is working. I say, God bless. But I'm not convinced, I really am not; in which case you will have lost everything from the middle-class teachers who supported you and loved you to the potential Tory supporters you were wooing with your strategy of making it appear that those teachers, those well-fed teachers, just didn't want to come to the table and didn't want to negotiate.

For six months you sat on your hands. For six months you and your minister sat on your hands, quite happy to distance them away from you as a way of claiming, "We tried." She wasn't at the table. She had fancy, fancy corporate lawyers there—fancy corporate lawyers at the table, the type Tories would love. Those people weren't there to negotiate a fair deal; they weren't there in a nice, collaborative approach to find a solution. No siree, they were there to distance the teachers away; that's what that was all about.

It's lovely to see the Premier's quotes in 2004, right after the Harris regime, and in 2009, about how "We've got to work together with the teachers. This is a collaborative approach." He said, "Oh, yeah, collective bargaining. That's the way to go. We've got to do that." Not but two years later, he changed his mind. What happened? Dalton, the man so loved by teachers, you give it all away. How could you do that? How could a rational human being do that?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Maybe not so rational.

The point is that in my view you have made a profound mistake in your approach to this issue, and I think you're going to be hurt by it. I believe a lot of the backbenchers believe it as well, except they have very little control of this matter because this thing is run by the Premier's office—not even the Minister of Education, because the Minister of Education is there to listen to the directions given by the Premier and his political staff. That's the way the system works around here. But I know some of you are very, very nervous, because you've received calls from individual teachers and locals, federation locals, and I know you've done your best to hold them back. I know you've done your best to tell them how much you love them.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Not from the public. Only from the teachers; not from the public. Our constituency offices are quiet. We haven't heard from the public.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And that's okay; that's fine. Clearly, Minister Chiarelli, the Minister of Transportation, is saying that he's abandoned the teachers, meaning his strategy is working. He says, "We've had calls from teachers, but not the others," which means that he expected the teachers, as he whacks them, to feel bad and feel the pain. And they are calling, but the regular public that they're wooing—I mean, Conservative voters are saying, "Right on, Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Transportation. You're doing good."

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We're not hearing from the NDP voters either.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I wouldn't expect you to. I wouldn't think that they would be calling you, saying, "Bob Chiarelli, Minister of Transportation, great job. We love it," as you're going after them.

Speaker, I'm happy to have contributed a few comments on this debate. We now have my colleague France Gélinas from Nickel Belt who wants to contribute to this debate, and I'm happy to pass it off.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much. I'm pleased to recognize the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Merci, monsieur le Président.

Je ne peux pas vous dire comment insultée que je suis, ainsi qu'un demi-million de Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes qui vivent ici, quand je lis, dans un document intitulé *Le Feuilleton* et avis, que—écoutez bien ça, monsieur le Président. Vous allez tomber en bas de votre chaise. Je sais qu'elle est belle, votre chaise-là, mais attachez-vous parce que vous allez tomber en bas de votre chaise. Savez-vous ce que ça dit? Ça dit ici que le gouvernement—

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Page 13. Ça le dit en anglais; je vais vous le lire en anglais :

"That, in the opinion of this House, full-day kindergarten is the single most important investment the government can make in the social and economic future of our children and, on this basis, the House supports the government's commitment to ensure that 250,000 Ontario four- and five-year olds will be enrolled"—puis c'est là que ça devient vraiment insultant—"in North America's first full-day kindergarten program by September 2014."

Quand il y a un Franco-Ontarien ou une Franco-Ontarienne qui lit ça, monsieur le Président, c'est comme un couteau au coeur, parce que saviez-vous qu'en Ontario français, ça fait maintenant 12 ans qu'on a le programme à temps plein pour les enfants de quatre ans et cinq ans? Ça fait 12 ans que cela existe en Ontario français, puis on a un gouvernement libéral qui nous dit que c'est le premier programme en Amérique du Nord, qu'on vient d'inventer ça, qu'on va faire quelque chose de merveilleux pour les petits Ontariens de quatre ans et cinq ans, quand en réalité, depuis 12 ans, cela existe.

Cela existait en Ontario français, mais voyez-vous, monsieur le Président, l'Ontario français, pour le gouvernement libéral, n'existe pas. On n'existe pas. Ça fait 12 ans qu'on a un programme de maternelle à temps plein, de prématernelle à temps plein, de jardin, qu'on a un programme—des programmes—de garderie avant et après l'école. Puis, ça n'existe pas parce que c'est l'Ontario français qui fait ça. Puis voyez-vous que ça se passe en Ontario français? On s'en fou. On s'en fou. « C'est juste les francophones. On n'a pas besoin de s'occuper d'eux autres. Ils se démerdent par eux-mêmes. »

Le gouvernement n'est pas là pour les aider, les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes. On est là pour mettre en place un nouveau programme, le meilleur programme en Amérique du Nord, un nouveau

programme qui n'existe nulle part. On est le premier en Ontario.

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire pour les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes, monsieur le Président, s'ils sont en train de dire que c'est un nouveau programme qui n'a jamais existé en Amérique du Nord? On ne parle plus de l'Ontario ou du Canada; on parle de l'Amérique du Nord.

Ça veut dire que tous les efforts que font les Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens à tous les matins—savez-vous ce que ça veut dire d'être Franco-Ontarien? Ça veut dire qu'à tous les matins, quand je me lève, je décide de continuer le combat, parce qu'à tous les matins quand je me lève, la chose la plus facile à faire serait de parler l'anglais. La chose la plus facile à faire serait de me laisser assimiler, parce que partout où je vais, je suis bombardée par des messages anglais.

Mais non. Moi, puis un demi-million d'autres personnes, à tous les matins, on se lève, on prend notre garde, et on se dit, «Moi, je suis fier d'être Franco-Ontarien». Puis moi, je suis fière de ce que les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes ont développé dans notre province. Il n'y a rien qui nous a été donné. Pensez-vous que les programmes de maternelle, de jardin à temps plein, dans les écoles francophones, ça nous est venu du ciel? Pensez-vous que ça nous est venu du gouvernement?

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Regardez ce qu'ils nous disent, monsieur le Président. Il nous disent que c'est le premier programme en Amérique du Nord. Je ne peux pas vous dire comment ça blesse. Ça blesse tellement. C'est se faire dire par son gouvernement que les francophones n'existent pas en Ontario, que ce qui se passe dans notre vie, les succès qu'on a eus—parce qu'il ne faut pas se leurrer: la maternelle à temps plein, le jardin à temps plein pour les francophones de l'Ontario, ça était un succès, monsieur le Président. Ça était un tel succès que dans tous les médias francophones, on en a parlé. Cela a été étudié. Cela était présenté dans des conférences comme un programme novateur, un programme à succès.

Les Franco-Ontariens ont fait leur marque avec ces programmes-là. Il y a 12 ans de ça. Et depuis ce temps-là, tu as plein de petits Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes qui auraient peut-être été tentés d'aller dans le système anglais. C'est tellement plus facile. Il y a plus d'écoles. Tu n'es pas obligé de prendre un autobus pendant des heures pour te rendre dans une école francophone qui est à des milles et des kilomètres de chez vous. Tu peux traverser la rue et te rendre dans le système anglais. Ça rendrait la vie tellement facile.

Mais non, on avait, en Ontario français, développé un programme gagnant. On avait développé un programme de maternelle à temps plein. De là, voilà 12 ans quand cela a commencé en Ontario du côté anglais, et c'est «le premier en Amérique du Nord.» Je vous dis, on s'excuse d'être là. On s'excuse d'avoir survécu pendant toutes ces années-là. Mais ce que je vous dis, monsieur le Président, on est là, les Franco-Ontariens, puis on n'a pas l'intention de s'en aller.

M. Gilles Bisson: Je suis là avec toi.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Gilles est là avec moi.

M. Rosario Marchese: Moi aussi. Nous autres—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Puis Rosario aussi, peut-être Taras aussi. On est là, puis on a l'intention d'y rester.

Puis cela a payé des dividendes, monsieur le Président. On a du succès avec nos écoles. On a du succès avec les écoles françaises. Les gens sont fiers de ce qu'ils ont accompli. Puis ils l'ont accompli pour et par les Franco-Ontariens.

Quand je vous dis pour et par, la méthode qu'ils avaient en place, c'était vraiment de travailler avec les partenaires locaux. Il y a beaucoup d'écoles—je peux parler des écoles de mon comté où c'était le Carrefour francophone qui offrait la garderie avant et après. Il y avait des systèmes de garderie dans toutes les écoles francophones et plusieurs écoles d'immersion, monsieur le Président. Les écoles d'immersion avaient vu ça, eux-aux autres aussi, puis elles en étaient fières.

Donc, on avait développé une méthode, un système, pour et par les francophones où non seulement les écoles francophones offraient le service de jardin à temps plein, de maternelle à temps plein, on avait également le système de garderie, et ça se faisait en collaboration avec des organismes francophones existants. Cela a permis à des organismes francophones de vraiment solidifier leur assise parce que ça leur permettait non seulement d'offrir des programmes à un groupe captif—c'était tous des petits francophones; ils étaient à l'école puis ils voulaient apprendre le français—ça nous permettait de sécuriser des organismes francophones.

Tous ceux qui suivent un peu l'actualité du côté franco-ontarien connaissent la cause Montfort. On connaît également M^e Caza. M^e Caza est celui qui a défendu Montfort quand on voulait se débarrasser du seul hôpital francophone où les étudiants pouvaient apprendre en français à travailler en santé.

M^e Caza, quand il a défendu la cause Montfort, nous a démontré à tout le monde que si on veut que les Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens continuent à survivre dans notre province, il faut leur donner—il appelait ça des îlots. Il disait qu'être francophone, c'est comme tu es dans un grand lac, puis il faut toujours que tu nages. Sinon, bien, tu noies. Moi, à tous les matins, je me décide de nager comme Franco-Ontarienne. Sinon, je coule.

Puis là, tu vois les anglophones qui, eux, se promènent en bateau. Ils passent et puis ils font des vagues. Seul les anglophones se promènent en bateau. Mais de temps en temps, tu as un îlot. Tu as un îlot où tu peux reprendre ton souffle, où tu peux te reposer un petit peu.

Ces îlots-là, ce sont les agences francophones. Donc, un îlot à Sudbury, c'était le Carrefour francophone. Tu peux aller là, puis tu n'as pas besoin d'écouter pour savoir s'il y a quelqu'un qui va vouloir que tu parles en anglais. Tu peux parler en français, c'est sûr et certain. À Timmins, ils ont La Ronde. C'est la même chose. Ces îlots-là—

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il y en a un peu partout. Il y en a un à Toronto, le Centre francophone de Toronto. On en a un peu partout.

Donc, ces îlots-là nous permettent comme francophones d'arrêter de nager pour un couple de minutes puis de nous reposer. C'est un peu comme ça que M^c Caza nous a expliqué ça.

Mais qu'est-ce que ça permet, ces petits îlots-là? Ça permet à la communauté francophone de reprendre son souffle ensemble. Ça nous permet de nous reposer, de se connaître l'un l'autre, de s'entraider l'un l'autre et de continuer.

Avec le système qui avait été développé pour et par les francophones, on avait mis en place des partenariats avec d'autres groupes francophones. Donc, des groupes francophones rentraient dans les écoles françaises, rentraient dans les écoles francophones, puis nous expliquaient, « Voici la programmation qu'on peut offrir avant et après l'école. Voici ce qu'on peut offrir pour vous aider avec la maternelle et le jardin à temps plein », puis tout ça. Ça marchait bien. Ça marche bien, et ça marche bien depuis 12 ans.

Là, le gouvernement libéral de M. McGuinty nous arrive puis nous dit, « C'est un beau programme-là que vous avez développé pour et par les Franco-Ontariens. On ne le regarde pas. On s'en fou. Ça n'existe pas. Nous autres, on arrive avec nos gros sabots puis on va vous dire comment ça va se faire, la maternelle à temps plein. »

Les Franco-Ontariens ont fait quelque chose que je n'avais jamais vu. Chacune des agences franco-ontariennes de la province, de la plus petite à la plus grosse—on parle de la FAFO, des conseils scolaires; on parle même des évêques et des caisses populaires. S'il y avait un francophone là-dedans, ils ont signé une lettre. La même lettre a été signée par vraiment les agences qui représentaient les 500 000 Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes qui existent ici pour dire au gouvernement McGuinty, « Écoutez. On existe déjà. Le programme de maternelle à temps plein, il existe déjà du côté francophone. Puis, on ne le fait pas comme ça, nous. On le fait autrement. »

Ils n'ont pas écouté, monsieur le Président. Ils n'ont pas écouté un seul mot de ce que les 500 000 Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes avaient à dire. Ils sont rentrés là avec leurs gros sabots, puis ils ont dit, « La maternelle à temps plein, ça va se faire comme ça », point à la ligne.

Les francophones ont continué de crier le plus fort qu'ils pouvaient pour leur dire, « On a des droits. On sait comment faire les choses. Regardez. On a de l'expérience. Ça fait 10 ans »—dans le temps, ça faisait 10 ans—« qu'on l'offre, la maternelle à temps plein. Apprenez de nos meilleures pratiques. On est prêt à les partager avec vous. » Pantoute.

Ils ne voulaient rien savoir; ils ne nous écoutaient pas. Et on continuait avec l'idée qu'ils avaient en tête : que la maternelle à temps plein, ça devait se faire comme ça. Ils avaient un cadre de référence. Ou bien tu rentrais dans la boîte ou bien tu restais chez vous.

Au bout d'un an et demi, quand tous les beaux partenariats qui avaient été établis avaient été rompus, quand tous les beaux programmes qui avaient été

développés pour et par les francophones étaient devenus histoire du passé, ils ont dit, « Ah, bien. Peut-être qu'il y avait de bonnes idées dans ces partenariats-là. En fait, les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes, on devrait peut-être les écouter. » Mais c'était trop tard, monsieur le Président. Il était trop tard. Nous à Sudbury, le Carrefour francophone avait perdu 90 % de ses contrats. Ils ont failli faire banqueroute. Ça, comme je vous ai dit plutôt, c'était un îlot pour les francophones de Sudbury. C'était un îlot que le gouvernement McGuinty a failli tuer par sa politique pour la maternelle à temps plein.

« Le premier programme en Amérique du Nord. » Quand j'entends des choses comme ça, monsieur le Président, je n'ai pas le goût de rire—pantoute. Ce n'est pas drôle de se faire dire par son gouvernement qu'on n'existe pas, de se faire dire par le gouvernement libéral que ce qui se passe dans le milieu francophone, c'est correct de l'ignorer; on ne demande même pas de regarder ce qu'on fait. C'est correct de l'ignorer, de ne pas en parler, de ne pas apprendre des autres. C'est correct de faire comme si on n'existait pas.

C'est décourageant, ça, monsieur le Président, puis ils savent tout ça maintenant, hein? Parce que des réunions avec la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones, on en a eu une, puis une autre, puis une troisième, puis une quatrième. Même chose avec la ministre de l'Éducation. Même chose avec les ministres qui s'occupent—they savent tout ça. Ils savent l'histoire. Ils savent les meilleures pratiques. Ils savent comment blessant c'était de se faire dire qu'on n'existe pas.

Mais on est rendu le 30 août 2012, puis on a encore un document écrit par le gouvernement libéral de M. McGuinty qui dit « le premier programme en Amérique du Nord. »

Qu'est-ce ça me dit, monsieur le Président? Ça me dit qu'ils n'ont rien compris. Ça me dit que l'on ne compte pas. Puis ça me dit que ça ne dérange pas, toutes les belles choses qu'on a faites. Tout ce qui compte, c'est les gains politiques. Tout ce qui compte, à la fin de la journée, monsieur le Président, c'est de s'assurer qu'ils vont gagner dans Kitchener–Waterloo. C'est tout ce qui compte.

On n'a pas été demandé de revenir ici pour parler de la maternelle. Apparemment, il y avait une crise dans le milieu de l'éducation. Il fallait absolument revenir deux semaines à l'avance pour faire passer un projet de loi par rapport à l'éducation. Mais là, on nous présente des choses comme ça. Apparemment, c'est bien important ce matin qu'on se parle d'un programme qui existe depuis 12 ans, monsieur le Président. On est revenu deux semaines à l'avance pour se parler d'un programme qui existe depuis 12 ans, pour lequel on n'a l'intention de faire aucun changement. Pouvez-vous m'expliquer, c'est quoi la raison pour laquelle on est ici ce matin?

On est ici ce matin parce qu'il y a des gains politiques à faire. Le gain politique à faire là? Il est clair : c'est une élection partielle à Kitchener. C'est juste ça. Le programme de maternelle à temps plein est en place depuis 12 ans. Il va continuer comme il était supposé de continuer. Il n'y a absolument rien qui va changer. Si

vous m'écoutez à la télé, vous êtes en train de perdre votre temps. Vous pouvez fermer la télé. Il n'y a rien qui est en train de se passer à Queen's Park. On est en train de perdre notre temps, de parler d'un programme qui existe depuis 12 ans, auquel on n'a l'intention de faire aucun changement.

Mais il faut en parler parce que les libéraux pensent que, en parlant de la maternelle à temps plein, en faisant croire qu'il y a une crise dans le milieu de l'éducation puis qu'ils sont les sauveurs, eux, ils vont gagner une siège de plus à Kitchener, et ça va leur permettre d'avoir un gouvernement majoritaire.

C'est pour ça, monsieur le Président, qu'on est en train de perdre notre temps aujourd'hui pour pouvoir parler d'un programme qui ne changera pas.

Moi, je peux vous dire que dans mon comté il y a des gens qui attendent depuis longtemps de venir me rencontrer. Dans mon comté il y a des gens qui restent sur des chemins de bois; ça me prend deux heures sur un chemin de terre me rendre jusqu'à chez eux, puis eux autres, ils m'attendaient cette semaine. Je ne vais pas souvent à Bisco, puis je ne vais pas souvent dans des communautés où je dois faire quatre heures de route en plein milieu de la saison de la foresterie, où il y a toujours un gros « truck » qui va venir; tu es obligé de te mettre quasiment dans le fossé pour venir à bout de les laisser passer, ces affaires-là, en plein milieu du bois, mais j'y vais pendant l'été.

Je n'irai pas, monsieur. Je n'irai pas parce que je dois être ici pour vous parler d'un programme qui existe depuis 12 ans puis qui ne changera pas. Ça, c'est un affront à tous ceux qui avaient besoin de parler à leur députée. Nous ne sommes pas capables d'être dans nos comtés parce qu'il faut être ici. Il faut être ici pour que les libéraux aient quelque chose à dire dans les médias pour venir à bout de gagner un comté, et ce sont les gens qui restent dans nos comtés qui paient. Ce sont les gens qui restent dans le nord de Nickel Belt qui s'attendaient à voir leur députée pendant les deux dernières semaines que j'étais dans mon comté qui ne me verront pas. Ce sont des gens qui vont avoir à faire quatre heures de route, deux heures de ça sur une route de gravier, pour venir me voir un vendredi quand je suis dans mon comté. C'est pas correct, ça. C'est pas correct.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It being 10:15, this House is in recess until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. In the budget act of 2010, you said you'd bring in a wage freeze. As part of that budget act, you had subsection 8(3), which allows for three ways you can actually

increase pay for bureaucrats outside the wage freeze: (1) his or her length of time of employment or in office, (2) an assessment of his or her performance, and (3) his or her successful completion of a program or course of professional technical education.

Premier, you created a big loophole in your wage freeze that resulted in 98% of senior bureaucrats getting bonus pay increases at the time of the wage freeze. Can you answer me, directly, why did you create the McGuinty loophole in the budget bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There is no doubt that the pay-for-performance system that was established by the Mike Harris government is broken. There is absolutely no question about that, Mr. Speaker. We are undertaking a review now to address the valid challenges that rest there. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that in the last budget, we froze executive compensation. He voted against that in the budget; he voted against the budget bill.

Mr. Speaker, I'll remind him that the total amounts of money available for that type of compensation are now lower than they were when he left office in 2003. I would also remind him that a part of that money goes to front-line staff who are not part of bargained units.

We agree it is broken. We will be bringing forward appropriate changes to ensure that that Harris government policy is put out of practice and replaced with a real freeze that saves taxpayers' money and gets us back to balance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, there's an expression—I know they don't call this answer period. They've started calling it total evasion period on the other side of the House.

Let me see if I can get the Premier's attention for a moment here on my lead question. Premier, I know you talk about Mike Harris every day, but Mike Harris wasn't the Premier in 2010. You were. This is your bill, and you created the McGuinty loophole that gave 98% of bureaucrats pay increases.

Let me ask you this, Premier: Last year, you saw eHealth employees get 7% bonuses for merit for the mess they created at eHealth. Then you learned that 98% of bureaucrats got merit pay increases during a wage freeze. I know, Premier, that you would have banged your fist on your desk, you would have called staff on the carpet, you would have put an end to this. When you asked staff how many got bonus pay increases last year and the year before, what exactly did they tell you?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The pay-for-performance system is broken, and we're going to change it. We have said that. Mr. Speaker, we have moved to freeze executive compensation across the public and broader public sectors, which was part of this year's budget that that member and his party voted against. We concur that the appropriate course of action now is to fix that system. Therefore we will be bringing forward the appropriate

legislative and administrative changes that will give effect to that.

I look forward to the Leader of the Opposition's support of that bill. I think we will probably have it by the mid-part of September. I know he'll want to pass that as quickly as possible, so that we can in fact address that very real question that's still out there.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: If you want to pass it, then support Jeff Yurek's private member's bill from back in May that would have ended this practice—an across-the-board pay freeze.

Again, I worry that the Premier's energy may be fizzling, like his legislative agenda in this session. I want to tell you, Premier, I'm disappointed that you have no new answers. Bill 115 will pass. We'll support it; we've said that. It's a partial wage freeze, a bit of a wage freeze on training wheels. We're going to keep pushing for more, Speaker.

Premier, you seem to have run out of gas. You have no new ideas on the table. I've suggested you close the McGuinty loophole when it comes to bonus pay increases. I've suggested an across-the-board wage freeze as well. I've suggested that you end this odious practice of closed tendering that saw \$148 pencil sharpeners here in Toronto, or 40% ballooning costs on Ivor Wynne stadium in Hamilton. Premier, if you're out of ideas, which of our three ideas will you adopt to actually get serious in this session and do something about the \$30-billion hole?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have an aggressive legislative agenda that keeps teachers in schools, keeps nurses in hospitals, gets more doctors for people and will bring this government back to balance long before other jurisdictions.

We have an aggressive agenda. They have a bankrupt agenda. His member's bill was flawed; won't achieve what he wants to do. Later today, they're going to introduce legislation that tells us to keep giving millions of dollars to horse track owners. That's what they're about; they're about horse-race owners.

We're about teachers. We're about classrooms. We're about full-day learning. We will get back to balance. We're well on our way, through a responsible, balanced plan that will keep teachers in our classrooms and protect the important gains we've made in education and health care.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean—Carleton, would you come to order, please.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What about him, Speaker? It's both of them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): It's nice to banter back and forth, but you're being extremely loud and I cannot hear the answer. I'm sure that soon I will not

be hearing the questions. Yesterday, a lot of people were complaining that I did not hear the language.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The clock, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock for a second.

I would ask you to keep your voices low, please. Thank you.

New question.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll try going back to the Premier, Speaker.

Premier, I said a week ago that Bill 115 would pass—it's a no-brainer—and I asked you what comes next. You've had no answers at all. Anything you have on the legislative agenda is new spending. So let me try something else, since you've said no to every one of our ideas.

Yesterday, Premier, you mused about ending bankable sick days across the province, the practice where sick days accumulate and then you get bought out upon retirement, some to the tune of \$50,000. Quite frankly, when you're staring at a \$30-billion hole, the time for musing is over. The time for action is now. Will you support our call for an end, across the broader public service, to this bankable-sick-days practice, for the benefit of taxpayers in our great province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As my honourable colleague is wondering what role he might play to help us move forward good public policy, I want to remind him that our healthy homes renovation tax credit was introduced on November 23. That was 10 months ago.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, come to order, please.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It would save seniors up to \$1,500 annually; it can create over 10,000 jobs annually. They've been blocking that for 10 months now.

There's the Family Caregiver Leave Act, introduced December 8. That was nine months ago. It provides up to eight weeks of job-protected leave to care for sick loved ones. They've been blocking that, I say once again, for nine months.

I have a longer list, Speaker. I'm looking forward to getting to more of it. My honourable colleague should understand that there are good things we can do together, but we're going to need his support to do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Clearly, evasion period continues here from the Premier. I asked a very simple question. To the Premier's point: You know what? We expected something in this session. There was all the buildup and drama. It was coming in like a legislative lion, but it has turned into a lame-duck session. Your cupboards are bare, Premier. Where are your ideas? We're putting ours on the table—bold ideas to actually get our fiscal house

in order and create jobs, and he says no to every single one.

1040

So, Premier, I'll ask you back: From the PC Party point of view, sick days are for being sick; that's basic. They're not something to be banked and stored up and then shelled out to taxpayers at the end of the day. It seems to me to be very basic that this bankable-sick-days practice is a creature of the past, and if you won't act, my colleague will. Mr. Shurman is bringing in a bill that says sick days are for sick people. Will you support it, Premier, and end this practice that is bankrupting our province?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Be seated, please.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think my honourable colleague will know the position that we've taken on bankable sick days in our Putting Students First legislation.

In fact, my honourable colleague should understand that there is, in fact, I think, amongst our broader public sector partners, an openness and a willingness and an acceptance that that is a practice that really should be reviewed in light of our fiscal circumstances. In fact, 55,000 teachers have agreed that it's no longer acceptable to have this practice of bankable sick days. So I think we're moving in the same direction.

But there are some other practical things that we've been talking about for a long time here, and we could use the support of the opposition to move forward with this. One of those is the air ambulance reform act. It was introduced on March 21—that was five months ago. My honourable colleague says he's very concerned about ensuring that we have in place all the progress that we can make with respect to improving the quality of service at Ornge, Speaker; they've been blocking it for five long months. If we had their support, that's yet another piece of legislation we could move ahead with.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, quite frankly, if you want to see Bill 50 debated, put it on the floor of the Legislature. You refuse to call it for a single day.

The bottom line: If you truly care about Ornge, Premier, then get out from behind your desk, go before the committee like your health minister had the guts to do, like others have had to do. What are you hiding from?

But here's the bottom line, Premier: We support Bill 115; it's going to pass. But if it's good for teachers, why isn't it good for firefighters? Let me give you some examples. Firefighters of Windsor are entitled to 18 bankable sick days a year under the current contract. If they don't use them, they cash them out. Once they retire, they can cash out up to six months, approximately a \$50,000 payoff from already hard-hit taxpayers in Windsor. This costs \$2 million to \$3 million to the city of Windsor.

My colleague Mr. Shurman is leading. He's going to bring in the Sick Days are for Sick People Act. Premier, doesn't that sound fair and reasonable? Will you work with Mr. Shurman or, at the very least, will you support this bill to help begin to balance the books in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're delighted to see that you're following our lead. We've stated very specifically where we stand on bankable sick days with respect to the agreements that we've entered into with 55,000 Ontario teachers.

If my honourable colleague is proposing that they reach into municipal employee groups, then I think that may be a horse of a different colour. My approach with respect to that is to encourage municipalities to take a look at their fiscal circumstances, to ask themselves what's appropriate today. What's appropriate today may not have been what was appropriate before, so that may require that they make some changes. We understand that.

We've indicated where we are going with respect to our agreement with teachers. We're delighted to see that we have the support of 55,000 teachers in that regard. Speaker, we'll have more to say about this in the days to come.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Can the Premier tell us when he first learned that 98% of managers and executives in the Ontario public service were receiving bonuses in this time of restraint?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I understand that my honourable colleague is moving ahead with a bill, and I want to second the sentiments and the intent that informs that proposed legislation, and we look forward to learning a few more details connected with that.

I have said that if 98% of those who were eligible for performance pay are getting it, then it's not performance pay, it's just pay, and we need to review that practice that was put in place by the PC government. I've asked the Minister of Finance to take a long, hard look at that and to return to this House with a proposed bill. We look forward to working with the opposition to make sure we get that right.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier has asked Ontario families to tighten their belts, and our schools, our hospitals. In hundreds of aspects of everyday life, people are being told that we're in an era of restraint. Yet as people are making these sacrifices, they consistently see that those who least need a break keep getting one.

Can the Premier explain to them why this keeps happening and when, if ever, he plans to do something about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As the leader of the third party has indicated, they have brought forward a bill, and we're

grateful of that. Their bill does have some flaws. Their bill would cover approximately 30 of the 9,000 employees who got compensation—30 of 9,000, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go on to some more details about the shortcomings in the bill. It was obviously done on the back of a napkin and rushed out the door because of political purposes during the by-election. She also, in her bill, overrides Bill 55, the executive compensation freeze. I'm sure that was an administrative oversight on their part, because she supported that at the time. But her bill that she's tabling today will affect 30 employees. It will override the executive compensation freeze, and while it's an important step forward, we'll bring forward a comprehensive response that deals with the real problem, not just for the by-elections next week but for a better future for all Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, those who live in glass houses should not be throwing stones, I would say. The reality is, the Premier likes to point a finger of blame, and so does the finance minister, at everybody except for themselves, but people are not going to be fooled any more. If they are genuinely interested in a balanced approach to balancing the books, we have a pretty good idea with this bill.

I just want to know, is this government prepared to take a very simple step and work with New Democrats to ban bonuses for executives in this province?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes. Unfortunately, you've only dealt with 30 people who have contracts; the other 8,970 don't. You've exempted bargained employees. She has exempted AMAPCEO employees, many of whom get pay-for-performance increases.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order, please.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That's not acceptable. We will bring forward a comprehensive piece of legislation that is about a better future for Ontario, that allows us to balance the books while we continue to—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I would ask you to come to order and lower your voice. The next warning would be my final.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we welcome this bill. It's flawed, it's incomplete, it's one-sided, and it's designed for the by-elections next week. We'll bring forward a comprehensive response to an important public policy challenge that's in the best interests of all Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. New question.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats don't believe in just tearing up contracts. We think it costs the province

a heck of a lot more money in the long run, and that's why we've put our bill together the way we have.

My next question, Speaker, is to the Premier. Earlier this year, the Premier stated, "We feel obligated to follow the law set up by the Supreme Court of Canada when it comes to dealing with our public sector partners." Can I just ask the Premier, when did he decide that he's no longer obligated to follow the law?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm delighted to take the question, Speaker, but I see things differently from my honourable colleague in this regard. We have been very careful in taking the advice of experts in this area in ensuring that we are following the law. I know there was a specific criticism in the Supreme Court of Canada decision of the BC government because they failed to give adequate notice. I think, in the circumstances, they gave 20 minutes' notice to their collective bargaining partners. We've been working on this for some six months. There was a specific reference in the budget papers back in March of this year, setting out the program—

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Page 74.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Page 74; I'd recommend that to my honourable colleague.

Mr. Paul Miller: Page 74?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Page 74. I'd recommend that he take a look at that, Speaker. You'll see that we make specific reference to the fact that we work as hard as we can through collective bargaining. If we can't achieve it through there, Speaker, then we'll find a way to make it happen otherwise, including through legislation.

1050

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everyone realizes that today the Canadian Civil Liberties Association added their voice to the growing number of experts who say that the government's legislation goes too far and it's likely to cost us a lot of money when it's thrown out of the courts. Earlier today, the association director said that this bill violates people's rights. She went on to say, "People's rights are not something to be trifled with." Frankly, I agree with her. Can the Premier produce any evidence that his bill won't be thrown out by the Supreme Court?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that this does present us with an opportunity to compare the positions of the three parties that are privileged to serve in this Legislature. My honourable colleague the leader of the NDP says that we are moving far too aggressively. The leader of the Progressive Conservatives says that we are being far too timid. We're bringing a balanced, thoughtful, responsible approach. We are working as hard as we can through the collective bargaining process. We've also made it clear that if that fails to achieve our fiscal targets, then we will do what is necessary to uphold the greater public interest, which demands that we take concrete steps to eliminate the deficit and do it in a way that

protects our schools and protects our health care. We're in the middle, Speaker. We're balanced, thoughtful, responsible and lawful.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't think the Premier has been paying attention. We think that they're looking after their own self-interest. That's where we're coming from on this side of the House. They're taking care of their own self-interest when it comes to this bill. It's not about aggressiveness; it's about their own self-interest as opposed to the public interest.

After months and months of warning about the dangers of the Conservatives' short-sighted, simplistic wage plans, the Premier now expects people to embrace his short-sighted, simplistic wage plans. I don't think he's going to succeed.

People are very tired. They are weary of paying the price for this government's desperate drive for majority power. And parents certainly don't want to pay the price in our classrooms either.

Why is this Premier rejecting the advice of constitutional experts who say that this bill simply won't work? Is it only because he has a by-election on his radar next week?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, earlier I talked about the contrasting positions between the three parties. Now I'll just focus on the difference between our approach and that of the NDP.

The NDP are in favour of a pay hike for teachers. We can't afford that at this point in time. We think that what little money we have should be devoted to improving the quality of the classroom experience.

The other thing that our agreement does and that our legislation does is, it puts an end to bankable sick days. A moment ago, she said she was against bankable sick days. Now she's saying that in fact she's going to be supportive of them.

Speaker, I think it's important to understand that ultimately what this is all about, when you cut right through the fog, is: They want to give teachers an increase in pay. We can't afford to do that right now, not given our fiscal constraints. What we need to do is make difficult but sensible and thoughtful choices. Our choice, instead of putting money into teacher pay, is to put it into the classroom and roll out full-day kindergarten and keep class sizes small. That's in the interests of students and families.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier chose to ignore the request of the committee that he appear as a witness. He decided it was more important to host a photo op—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the Minister of the Environment come to order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Then he told us that he'll answer any questions here in the Legislature. But Hansard does not lie, because the record will show that virtually every question he was asked about that scandal here he deflected to the minister, to his House leader or the Minister of Finance.

Choosing to deflect those questions is not good enough. We won't accept it; the people of this province won't accept it. That's why this morning the committee clerk was instructed to once again extend an invitation to the Premier to appear next Wednesday at 9 a.m. at the committee as a witness.

I'd like to know now from the Premier: Will he respect the request of that committee or will he choose once again to host a photo op rather than do the important thing, and that is to show up here and answer the important questions?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm here today to take these questions. I'll be here on Monday to take questions, Tuesday to take questions, Wednesday to take questions, and, if we're sitting on Thursday, I'll be here on Thursday to take questions as well.

I would suggest we've had a very thorough process to this point in time. The opposition has asked 467 questions in question period related to Ornge. There have been countless questions, of course, by the media. The committee has entertained 56 witnesses. They've heard from the Minister of Health on three separate occasions. They've sat for 81 hours, in 17 days. They've examined thousands of pages of documents and they've produced over 800 pages of Hansard. I would suggest that if nothing, the committee's work has been exhaustive. I think it's time for us to receive some positive recommendations so we can act on those.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, the Premier knows that his excuses are not only insulting to the committee, they're insulting to the institution of Parliament and they're insulting to the people of this province. Anyone who is familiar with the operation of question period knows that questions and answers are limited to but a few seconds. The reality is, that's why we have committees of the Legislature—so that we can call witnesses and investigate what they know.

We happen to believe that the Premier knows an awful lot more than he's willing to tell us. That's why, Speaker, he was called as a witness. I want to give the Premier one more opportunity to respect the parliamentary process and to respect the institution of Parliament. I'd like to ask him now, will you agree to appear as a witness at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the scandal at Ornge and tell us what you know, when you heard about it, what you did and why you chose not to put your hand into an intervening position on that scandal that has wasted millions of health care dollars in this province?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Can I have everyone sitting?

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my honourable colleague, I think he just wasted two specific opportunities to put specific questions to me.

I think Ontarians have different kinds of questions that weigh on their minds, should they give this some consideration. One of those would be, why does the opposition continue to block Bill 50? They say that they're interested in ensuring that we improve the quality of oversight that we bring to bear over Ornge. Bill 50 enhances our capacity as a government to put in place that kind of oversight.

They're also asking, after this exhaustive committee experience—56 witnesses, 81 hours, reviewing thousands of pages of documentation, over 800 pages of Hansard having been produced, Speaker—how much longer Ontarians are going to have to wait before the committee provides us with some positive, substantive recommendations.

The opposition says that they're interested on making progress on this file. So are we. Give us the recommendations and allow us to move forward with Bill 50.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Yesterday in public accounts, former Ornge employee Jay Lebo told the committee about the lies and illegal actions that were rampant at Ornge. This dates back to as early as 2008—around the same time the whistle-blowers started coming to your ministry. Speaker, I want to know, why did it take three long years? Why did we have to wait until the scandal hit the press before the minister acted?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, there is no question that there were activities at Ornge that are completely unacceptable. In fact, that is why the senior leadership that was at Ornge is no longer there. That is why the board of directors is no longer there. We have new leadership making the right decisions, providing more care for more people.

The committee has heard, as we've heard from the Premier, an extraordinary amount of testimony. Members of this Legislature need to now take the time to actually write the report and deliver their recommendations. We're talking about air ambulance service. This is an important topic. If you have advice, we want to know it. Please, I urge the member opposite to get that report and its recommendations to the government as quickly as possible.

1100

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, the problem is that the minister has never admitted that her ministry did anything wrong. Were there things wrong at Ornge? Absolutely. But they were doing wrong in the ministry as well. They failed to provide proper oversight of Ornge. In the Auditor General's special report, he is crystal clear:

The problems that developed at Ornge are due to a lack of oversight from the Ministry of Health. When will the minister admit that she got it wrong and that Ontarians can be reassured that next time we will get it right?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have been very clear from the beginning that I take my full share of responsibility, my ministry takes its full share of responsibility and we are putting in place those elements that were recommended by the Auditor General. We have a new performance agreement that gives us much stronger oversight.

We need Bill 50 passed. We can no longer tolerate the opposition blocking the passage of Bill 50. It contains more rigorous oversight; it contains protection for whistle-blowers. It's time to put the political games aside and move forward for the benefit of the people of this province.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is to the Minister of Education. This House has been recalled to address an important issue: ensuring that school starts in September, as scheduled, and continues uninterrupted. The Putting Students First Act protects the classroom experience for Ontario students, while asking teachers to take a pause in their pay, given the challenging economic circumstances that the province faces.

The Putting Students First Act is based on an agreement that the government reached with the Catholic teachers' union, OECTA. This deal was the result of more than 300 hours of discussions. One of the provisions of the OECTA memorandum of understanding is around a teacher's use of diagnostics. Speaker, through you to the minister: Would you please clarify what this means?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: First, let me say how proud I am of the deal that we reached with OECTA. Many people thought that that deal wasn't possible, but both parties persevered through some very challenging discussions, and after more than 300 hours, we reached an agreement which reflects our core commitment to student achievement. The approach that we've taken is designed to protect teaching jobs, small class sizes, maintenance of the classroom experience and full-day kindergarten.

Mr. Speaker, the increase in diagnostic assessment is fairly recent, and it's been part of how we've seen improved student achievement in our schools. These assessments are different from standardized tests or tests for report cards—they'll continue to exist. But we don't believe we have the balance right when it comes to the teacher's ability to make decisions about the student in front of them. The OECTA MOU requires that teachers continue to conduct these assessments and that absolutely no teacher can opt out. But instead of testing for the sake of testing, we'll ensure that these assessments inform the instruction of students, because that's the right thing to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the minister: We're all aware that the PCs do not share our view that teachers should be supported in their ability to make decisions around assessments. We've also heard that they are opposed to teachers across this province being hired in a fair and transparent way.

Given the realities of this minority government, you made changes to your bill to reflect their position. Minister, do these changes to the legislation around the balanced use of diagnostics and fair hiring no longer apply to any school board?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As members of this Legislature will know, before we introduced the Putting Students First Act in this House, we took the rare step of releasing the legislation publicly and also to the opposition. We got some advice from the official opposition, and the changes reflect their advice without amending the memorandum of understanding that was reached after six months and 300 hours of discussion. They were incorporated before introduction to help speed this bill's passage.

But let me be very clear: Every school board in the province will be required to abide by the same fair and transparent hiring practices and the same balanced approach to diagnostic assessment. What is different is that only the boards with OECTA and AEFO teachers, or any others who sign agreements before August 31, will be required to embed those provisions in local collective agreements. My strong preference was to see these provisions in every collective agreement and also in law, but minority calls for reasonable compromise, so we'll move forward with a regulation and a policy direction under the Education Act in order that we can see this bill passed.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Premier. Premier, I don't know if you know this, but people call you the Teflon Premier. It's not a compliment. They call you the Teflon Premier because you refuse to let anything stick to you. You refuse to show any accountability and responsibility. You occasionally provide a half-hearted apology, but when it comes to important issues facing Ontarians today, you let them slide right off of you.

So far, over 50 witnesses have been called to testify at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts investigating your government's Ornge air ambulance scandal. So far only two people have not agreed to testify: Dr. Chris Mazza and the Premier. That's some pretty select company for the Teflon Premier.

My question to the Premier is simpler: If you're not hiding anything, why don't you give the people of Ontario an hour of your time and testify in front of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on Wednesday at 9 a.m.?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, that's the 469th question asked by the opposition on the matter of Ornge,

but I would also put it in the same category as the one asked a few moments ago because it was a wasted opportunity to ask me something specific.

Again, we draw a distinction between the partisan interest and the public interest. The public interest demands that we continue to find ways to make progress. Bill 50 represents progress and is in keeping with the public interest. Receiving recommendations from the good work that has been done by the committee is in keeping with the public interest and that represents real progress.

I hope, on behalf of Ontarians, that at some point in time, the folks opposite will stop blocking Bill 50 and will give specific recommendations we can move forward with to enhance the services provided by Ornge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, let's be serious. This government's handling of the Ornge air ambulance scandal has been a debacle from start to finish. Witnesses have testified that this government stood by while employees were intimidated. Witnesses have testified that this government allowed millions of taxpayer dollars to line the pockets of Liberal insiders. Most egregious of all, witnesses have testified that the government has allowed patient safety to be compromised. All this information, all the work that this committee has done has come from testimony and people who want to improve the situation at Ornge. Imagine what we could learn if the Premier decided to testify. Imagine what we could learn if the Premier wanted to improve the situation.

Premier, will you do the honourable thing? Stand up, go to public accounts next Wednesday at 9 a.m. and tell the people of Ontario how you will improve the situation at Ornge.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Another wasted opportunity, Speaker. I'm here every day at question period and no specific, substantive questions are coming to me. There's just an endless litany of rants and rhetoric, which I don't think serve the public interest.

I think the Ornge committee has done some good work. They've heard from many, many witnesses. They've had the opportunity to examine thousands of pages of documentation. That work comes in concert with the work that we have done as a government to change the leadership, put in place a new performance agreement, to adopt the recommendations put forward by the auditor, to bring in the Ontario Provincial Police. We now have a specific piece of legislation, Bill 50. We'd like to move forward with that but they're blocking that.

We're also very interested in receiving specific recommendations: positive, constructive recommendations that will improve circumstances—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Answer.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —at Ornge, but we continue to wait for those recommendations. We continue to wait for support. When it comes to blocking Bill 50, I want to assure Ontarians they're for the partisan interest; we remain solely for the public interest.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians are absolutely outraged at the mistreatment of whales, dolphins and seals at Marineland. A new poll shows 83% of Ontarians want stronger regulation of zoos and aquariums. The US, in fact, has legislated protection of marine mammals since the 1970s. When will your government finally protect marine mammals in Ontario?
1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to thank the honourable member for her question. I've had the opportunity to hear from many, many Ontarians, via social media and doing some grocery shopping, in fact, Speaker, about how concerned they are about some of the unsettling, disconcerting news that has emerged in connection with this story.

I want to assure my honourable colleague and Ontarians alike that we are taking a very, very close look at the circumstances there, that we are allowing the SPCA to conduct their investigation and we're awaiting any advice that we might receive whatsoever that would lead us to come to the conclusion that we need to put in place stronger laws in Ontario. I will say to my honourable colleague that I appreciate the question she has brought to us today, and I appreciate the concerns expressed by thousands and thousands of Ontarians around the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: For years, Ontario's Environmental Commissioner has been urging the McGuinty government in vain to review its zoo licensing policies and to prevent substandard facilities, like the one we discussed, from obtaining exotic species. Zoos and aquariums need licences to keep chipmunks and raccoons, but they don't need licences for whales or dolphins or lions or elephants. Let me repeat that: They need licences for raccoons and chipmunks, but they don't need licences for whales or dolphins or lions or elephants. When will this government—we're asking when, Mr. Premier—finally put forward legislation to protect sea mammals and exotic animals in Ontario? The OSPCA can do nothing without legislation.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I too am very concerned about what is happening, and I want to thank the journalists who put this story in the forefront. I was very perturbed when this happened, and that's why, in 2009, we—our government—amended the legislation, and we now have the best legislation in Canada. This legislation had not been amended for the past 90 years, so we did it. If this legislation does not protect the marine mammals in Marineland, we will amend the legislation to make sure that all animals in Ontario are well protected.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question also is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Minister, I listened to your answer right now, and I appreciate that this government is taking this issue very seriously. As we know, there have been allegations made about Marineland and the health and wellness of animals at the facility. The news reports, as you said, have been disturbing and deeply troubling. My office has received emails and phone calls from many constituents and residents across Ontario who are very concerned about the issue and want us to take action.

Minister, what is the government doing to ensure that animals in Ontario are safe from abuse and neglect?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I was very concerned about what I read. But one thing that I want to say to Ontarians: I want to say to you that, if you see something like this, the first thing you should do is call the OSPCA. Yes, you can call the media, but first call the OSPCA, because they are the ones that can go and do the investigation. I'm told that in that situation they didn't have any complaints, so I was sorry to hear that. But again, we amended the legislation in 2009 to make sure that all animals in Ontario are well protected. I was very perturbed when the opposition put forward legislation to diminish the power of the OSPCA. If their legislation had passed, the OSPCA would not have been able to go there right away.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My follow-up question is to the minister. As we know, this legislation, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, is an important piece of legislation. You have mentioned how important it is. There have been allegations stating that Ontario has no laws controlling aquariums and zoos or protecting the animals inside. As I said earlier, it's very concerning to me and, I'm sure, to every member here and to many residents across Ontario. We've seen the photographs; we've seen the articles. It's quite disconcerting when you see some of these marine animals being treated the way they are.

Can you say with certainty, Minister, that our legislation protects these animals in these facilities?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, the legislation that we have in place does protect the animals. It's the strongest legislation that exists in Canada. Again, if I'm told that our legislation right now does not protect the marine mammals in Marineland, we will amend the legislation, because there's no place in Ontario for the mistreatment of animals.

Shame on you, the Conservative Party, who moved forward with legislation to diminish the powers of the OSPCA. You should be embarrassed, and people should take you to task for that.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please. Can everyone sit? Stop the clock.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Jack MacLaren doesn't like it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister of the Environment.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please.

Next question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Premier, in order to provide this House with accurate recommendations on how to improve patient safety at Ornge, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts needs everyone with relevant information to come forward so that we can get to the bottom of this.

You claim that your government wants to get to the bottom of this scandal, and you've said here today that you don't want to waste an opportunity to answer specific questions. Well, there is such an opportunity, Premier. It's next Wednesday at 9 o'clock in front of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Will you agree to appear?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would recommend to my honourable colleagues opposite that they understand that there is some urgency associated with improving the quality of an air ambulance service. These are people who are involved in emergencies. You would think that the opposition would be possessed by a sense of urgency. That's why I ask yet again, on behalf of Ontarians: Why do they stand in the way of passage of Bill 50? Why do they stand in the way of the committee concluding its work so it can provide us with some specific recommendations?

We've gone about as far as we can go as a government. We've replaced the leadership, put in place a new performance agreement, brought in the OPP and crafted legislation based on recommendations received from the auditor. Now we await support from the opposition with respect to Bill 50 and we await their recommendations. If they're truly, genuinely concerned about improving the quality of services offered by Ornge, then allow us to get this work done on behalf of patients.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Mr. Speaker, this government hasn't even seen Bill 50 to be important enough to even have called it, so forget about that.

Secondly, with respect to appearances before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, this government has reversed themselves completely from what they said earlier this spring about why we should be asking these questions.

I would read from Hansard from April 25 of this year. The Minister of Health said, "The member opposite is at that committee"—the Standing Committee on Public Accounts—"and she is able to ask questions at that committee. I think it's important that members of this Legislature do have the ability to ask those questions...."

Clearly, it's a priority for this government that we deal with those issues in committee. That's what we're attempting to do. Yesterday at committee, yet another one of the cabinet ministers, the Minister of Natural Re-

sources, was found to be guiding a witness to give cover to the Minister of Health and to interim Ornge CEO Ron McKerlie.

Too many key players that are connected to this Premier are connected with this, from Liberal president Alfred Apps, Liberal strategist Don Guy and the Minister of Health. Premier, will you appear before the committee?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I might categorize my honourable colleague's assertion, contained within her question, as fanciful. I think that's the kindest way I can put it, Speaker.

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What I can say is that I am here today, as I am pretty well every day during question period, to receive questions from my colleagues in the opposition. But I'm very concerned about the passage of Bill 50, and I want to put my honourable colleague on notice that at the end of question period today we will be seeking unanimous consent to receive second and third reading passage of Bill 50, so it can move forward right away. In a few moments we can hear that, Speaker. At the end of the day, we should be learning whether they're going to support that on behalf of Ontarians.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. By now it's no secret that thousands of good-paying jobs will be lost as a result of your government's decision to recklessly end the slots-at-racetracks program without any consultation. Even your own transitional panel has concluded that the \$50-million fund you propose will be completely inadequate to support any bridge to sustainability for the industry. Minister, when will your government produce a transition plan that will allow for real sustainability for the horse racing industry?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: That's a very good question from the member opposite. I appreciate it. As he knows, having been integrally involved in the issue for some time, which I also appreciate, I've asked the panel to spend some time working with the industry to see if we can come up with a way forward. You know that our good friends John Snobelen and Elmer Buchanan had some very interesting comments about the SAR program, which I accept. I also accept their observations, many of which were very positive, and have asked them to work toward seeing if we can point a way forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Your own panel estimates that the horse racing industry sustains 20,000 to 30,000 full-time jobs and thousands more part-time and seasonal jobs. It also makes it clear that most of these jobs are in danger of being lost unless there is sustainability put on the table, more so than the \$50 million currently pledged.

Minister, these are business people. They make decisions three and four years in advance. What I'm asking

you for today is a specific timeline. Are we waiting weeks, are we waiting months, are we waiting years before this government comes to the table with a comprehensive plan to ensure that the industry can transition into sustainability and maintain those good-paying rural jobs?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks again for the question. The report was quite decidedly clear about both the challenges in the industry as well as some of the potential hopeful aspects to the industry. I have asked the panel to continue to work with the industry, which by the way has been absolutely wonderful in terms of offering input. Hundreds of people offered input to the panel, and their report has been very, very well received within the industry. So I've asked the panel to reflect with the industry on what that might look like, and I've asked them to report by September 30. You know that.

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Mario Sergio: My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. There has been a lot of talk this summer regarding the future of Ontario Place. As a resident of Toronto for the past 54 years, I have always enjoyed visits to Ontario Place as a special summer treat, as have many like me in Toronto and across the province. What was once a thriving waterfront attraction for families has suffered a steady decline in attendance numbers over the past decades. Furthermore, despite numerous studies over the past 20 years to assess strategies to improve Ontario Place, it has largely remained unchanged for its 41 years. Can the minister please elaborate on what this government is doing differently to ensure Ontario Place's future success?

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you very much to the honourable member for asking the question. Speaker, this summer our government accepted all 18 recommendations proposed by my advisory panel on Ontario Place revitalization. The panel was chaired by John Tory and had six outstanding members, and I want to thank them for, really, a job well done.

We started a decisive plan to revitalize, renew and rejuvenate Ontario Place so that residents and visitors alike can rediscover this iconic attraction.

Speaker, a complex undertaking, the first of its kind in the history of Ontario Place, will begin with phase 1 work, including undertaking technical due diligence, site investigations, initiating an environmental assessment process and engaging in preliminary conversations with the private sector and the city of Toronto. We will gather information needed to ensure responsible, informed and prudent planning in revitalizing Ontario Place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have to thank the minister for his wonderful response.

Again, through you, Speaker: I know that many in my riding of York West are very interested in what the future

vision of Ontario Place will mean for families and the people of our province.

As we consider the future of Ontario Place, it is necessary to reflect on our past. For over 40 years, Ontario Place has been synonymous with our city's landscape: the Cinesphere and pods—an iconic landmark at our waterfront.

With 18 recommendations to consider, is there a core theme to ensure that Ontario Place remains a place for the public to enjoy, and can the minister please explain what original aspects of Ontario Place will be retained, if any?

Hon. Michael Chan: We are committed to ensuring that Ontario Place will be a place for Ontarians to live, to work, to play and to discover. Key priorities include: barrier-free access to the waterfront; favouring submissions that incorporate the Cinesphere and pods; year-round activities and events to draw diverse audiences; a mixed-use facility with strong private-public partnerships to offer innovative programming; and a residential component.

Speaker, allow me to be clear: Any development must protect sightlines to the water and create open public access to the waterfront.

Our priority is to ensure that Ontario Place will be a thriving cultural attraction that is sustainable for future generations, boosting tourism and creating jobs.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is for the Premier. Premier, your health minister has overseen as much waste, corruption and scandal as the former CEO of Enron, yet you continue to keep her on board and reject our demands for her resignation. So let's do a quick performance review to get to the bottom of it right here and now.

She's withheld critical information to get to the bottom of the mess at Ornge. She's racked up more than \$2 billion on your botched eHealth project with little to no results. She's even refused to allow the region of Waterloo to implement a life-saving emergency dispatching system that would shave two precious minutes off our response times.

So, Premier, will you commit to doing two things today: First, show up at the public accounts committee on Wednesday and tell the truth; and second, fire your incompetent health minister today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I've spoken on countless occasions about how my honourable colleagues in opposition see the matter of Ornge purely as a partisan political game. If ever there was evidence of that, it is my honourable colleague's comparison of our respected Minister of Health to the former leadership at Enron. I think that is beneath the dignity of this institution, and I would ask that my honourable colleague withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Supplementary? The member for Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question is a very specific one to the Premier about the air ambulance scandal. He asked for a very specific question; I'm going to give it to him.

The Premier knows how the system of debate works in this House. He knows how bills are passed. He knows that it is the government that calls bills for debate. He should know that Bill 50 was last called by his government here on June 6. He also knows, or should know, that the bill has had eight hours and 56 minutes of debate. My question is very specific: Why is the government blocking Bill 50? Why has the government not called Bill 50 for debate and moved it into committee? Why not?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think my honourable colleague knows that the matter of bringing bills forward into this House is the subject of some conversation between the House leaders.

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In fact, it is, Speaker, especially in the context of minority government. My honourable colleague knows as well that we are very interested in moving ahead with Bill 50. It's been the subject of considerable deliberation within our government. We have adopted many recommendations we've received from outside, including those put forward by the auditor. In fact, momentarily, we'll give the opposition an opportunity to demonstrate their genuine commitment to the passage of Bill 50.

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I detect a little bit of defensiveness over there, but shortly, we'll give my honourable colleague the opportunity to in fact specifically support the passage of both second and third reading so that we can move forward with this and do what we all think clearly is in the greater public interest.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thanks very much, Speaker, for saving me a couple of seconds. That was very helpful.

The question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. There are growing concerns about the impact of quarries in the Niagara Escarpment. Last week, the Niagara Escarpment Commission sought a judicial review of a decision to allow another major quarry, in Duntroon, on Niagara Escarpment lands, arguing that the decision failed to consider the need for a quarry.

Minister, you are in a paradoxical position of protecting the Niagara Escarpment, but also of promoting aggregate extraction. Will you assure Ontarians that you will put protection of the Niagara Escarpment first and work to reduce the impact of aggregate extraction on the ecologically important escarpment?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I do want to assure the member as well as all members of the Legislature and the province that indeed we recognize the absolute value and the ecological beauty of the Niagara Escarpment. Indeed,

that's why we have a commission in place that is there to provide us with the kind of advice that they do. At the same time, we recognize the challenges associated with the economic development opportunities that are there in terms of aggregates, but that's also why, may I say, we have a standing committee looking at the issue of aggregates in terms of review of the Aggregate Resources Act.

I can reassure the member and everyone else that indeed we take all those issues very, very seriously, as always, trying to find that balance, which is something that we speak about a great deal in our ministry and something that we try to take very, very seriously.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Government House leader?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request permission to move a motion without notice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has requested unanimous consent to move a motion without notice. I heard a no.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is my pleasure to acknowledge three fantastic people from Pickering here in our members' gallery. They are from the Pickering Dragon Boat Club. I'm going to speak more about this in a minute in a member's statement. They set a Guinness world record. But let me introduce to you head coach Scott Murray, paddler Suzanne and steerer Alexandra. Welcome to the Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

Mr. Robert Bailey: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services must show leadership and end the unnecessary and senseless labour dispute that her ministry has created at Hamilton's Barton Street jail.

Since August 14, corrections officers have been off the job, sent home by managers for, of all things, asking for the right to wear their protective vests without the fear of reprisals by management in the overcrowded maximum security facility.

On Monday, over 200 corrections officers brought their pleas for increased safety in the workplace right here to Queen's Park. Yet the minister continues to allow management to punish officers who have shown up each day ready to work, wearing equipment designed only to keep them safe in the event of an attack.

Health and safety in the workplace should be a right that all employees in Ontario enjoy, yet the health and safety of Ontario's correctional officers, and now the inmates, continue to be recklessly gambled away by this

government's mismanagement of Ontario's correctional system.

Earlier today, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services jumped at the chance to boast about protecting animals at Marineland, which we also are concerned for. This is now time for this minister to show the same concern for the health and safety of Ontario's correctional officers and the inmates that are under their protection.

LOCAL BUSINESSES IN STONEY CREEK

Mr. Paul Miller: The winds of change are blowing through Stoney Creek, and they're not really welcome. For years Creekers and Hamiltonians have enjoyed the cooling refreshment of an ice cream cone, an ice cream float, a sundae or other ice cream-based taste sensations. But all that is to come to an end, and in a few short days: on September 4.

For me, it's mixed feelings, because a new seniors' residence will be built on the site, but without Stoney Creek Dairy, which has been part of my entire life, I will always feel an emptiness at its loss. As a teen, I worked at the dairy. Whenever visitors come to Stoney Creek, I always take them to the dairy for the best ice cream anywhere. At least that was the case until a couple of years ago, when the ice cream began to be made in Quebec and transported back to our dairy—the beginning of the end.

Despite the loss of our dairy, we can be grateful for the years that many in our community would meet at the dairy on a hot summer's day, the jobs that many of our youth had at the dairy and the bragging rights for having the best ice cream in Ontario.

The other big change for Stoney Creek is the loss of our downtown local TD Bank. This bank has served our community for over 40 years. Knowing those across the counter made it a safe place where we were sure that our best interests would be at the forefront. Being able to drop into the bank while out for on a walk in downtown Stoney Creek made banking comfortable for many of our seniors, who will now have a take a bus or car or taxi just to do their banking in another TD Bank.

We are saddened by the loss of those local businesses and the piece of Stoney Creek history that goes away with it.

SCHOOL FOOD AND BEVERAGE POLICY

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I rise today to highlight something that's very important to the families in my riding and to me personally as a parent. As a mom, I know how healthy eating gives kids the fuels they need to propel them through the day. The research has consistently shown that it's imperative that kids get good nutrition and lead a healthy, active lifestyle. That's why I'm proud of our new school food and beverage policy. This policy has implemented nutrition standards for food and beverages sold in schools, including cafeterias, vending

machines and tuck shops. This will work to cultivate the healthiest environment for students and will advance their rates of success as well.

That's why I'm pleased that as part of the safe schools strategy, schools in my riding of Windsor West will receive a portion of the \$10-million investment in urban boards with at-risk students for student nutrition. I know this will mean a great deal to students and families in my riding. I am proud to be part of this government, which is committed to finding ways to make healthy food more attractive to kids, and I am proud to be part of a government that is so committed to making Ontario a healthier place for all kids to grow up.

BURLINGTON RIBFEST

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Burlington summers draw to a close with a tasty tradition, Canada's Largest Ribfest, an event that the National Post has dubbed "the Superbowl of ribfests."

This year's event, which runs from lunchtime on August 31 to dinnertime on September 3, beside Lake Ontario in the beautiful Spencer Smith Park, is the 17th annual ribfest—I can't believe that.

As in every year, the event will welcome visitors from all around the globe to taste some of the finest ribs lovingly cooked up by some of North America's top ribbers. It's also a showcase for Burlington's own Fearmans Pork, a key sponsor. Thanks to Fearmans CEO Patrick Sugrue for his involvement.

You don't even need a map. You can smell the ribs for miles, and you drive right down Lakeshore to get there, and the event always draws a crowd. Last year we had 152,000 people walk through the gates at Canada's Largest Ribfest, organized by the Rotary Club of Burlington Lakeshore.

This community event has raised more than \$2.3 million for local, national and international charities since it began. I'd like to invite my fellow members and all of Ontario to stop by and get a taste of a great Burlington tradition.

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Mrs. Laura Albanese: As the member of provincial Parliament for York South–Weston, I have been working for some time now, together with my community, in support of the redevelopment of St. John the Evangelist school. This Catholic elementary school in our riding has been overcrowded for years and now holds 480 students, although it had been designed to hold only 260.

As of next week, the students of St. John the Evangelist will be relocated 40 minutes away for the duration of the construction of the Weston tunnel by Metrolinx. The community and I are very concerned that if the school replacement does not occur at the same time that Metrolinx is building the tunnel beside the school, the kids and

families will be inconvenienced twice, through no fault of their own.

Building a new school is a priority for our community and myself. We have been advocating at the board level and with the Ministry of Education, and have been successful in securing a \$6-million commitment from the ministry last year toward a new school or an addition. Last May, the Toronto Catholic District School Board placed St. John the Evangelist first on its capital priority list. I hope to have the minister's support for additional funding to help make a new school for these students a reality.

Beginning the construction of a new school during the period of the Metrolinx construction will prevent the students from being inconvenienced twice, as I said before, through no fault of their own. This decision will have a profound effect on the kids and families of St. John.

GEORGE TACKABERRY

Mr. Steve Clark: In July, I was honoured to attend a special ceremony in the village of Athens for George Tackaberry, one of its most beloved citizens. It's a testament to this man and his remarkable contributions to the Athens-area community that most of the village showed up to celebrate with George and his family, including his 90-year-old mother, Phyllis.

By whatever measure you use, George Tackaberry is one of Athens's greatest citizens. The business he started in 1957, George Tackaberry Construction, celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. It's an incredible success story, Speaker, and over the course of those 55 years, George has lived by the philosophy that any personal success he enjoyed would be shared with the community. That commitment has motivated him to support countless projects and initiatives that have improved the quality of life for residents of all ages.

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It's impossible to compile a list, in part because so many of George's contributions were done without any fanfare whatsoever. But know this: Whether it's helping a family that lost a home to a fire, building a community soccer field or health centre, when there was a need, George was always there to help. No request was too great and none too small, including fulfilling a young boy's request to power up the local hockey rink to bring much-needed relief to a community recovering from the ice storm.

It's a privilege to know George Tackaberry. It's an honour to be able to call him a friend. I know I speak for everyone in Leeds–Grenville when I say to George, thank you.

POVERTY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yesterday, a group called Common Front released a report called *Falling Behind: Ontario's Backslide into Widening Inequality, Growing Poverty and Cuts to Social Programs*.

Speaker, did you know that Ontario has the largest increase in income inequality? The gap between the rich and the poor is the widest in Ontario. It has the worst record on affordable housing and the poorest funding of public services among all the other provinces in Canada. The report puts our province at the bottom of the pack when it comes to funding and access to public services like health care, education, justice or disability benefits.

It is time for every Ontarian, including our policy-makers, to face the disturbing facts about the growing gaps between the rich and the poor. Did you know that the average CEO salary has grown from 25 times that of the average Canadian worker to 250 times the salary of the average Canadian? This is unbelievable. Why is it that the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer?

This is not the result of economic concerns; it is the result of wrong-headed political decisions, political decisions that need to be changed so every Ontario resident has a chance at a better life.

PICKERING DRAGON BOAT CLUB

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Today, I'm very pleased to rise in the House to pay a very special tribute to a remarkable group of local athletes from my riding in Pickering–Scarborough East. Just this past Sunday, August 26, the Pickering Dragon Boat Club set a Guinness world record by paddling 214.39 kilometres. This feat marks the longest distance travelled in a dragon boat in 24 hours by a single crew. They have now successfully reclaimed the record they held from 2004 to 2008 after their initial record was eclipsed by an Australian club.

The 26-member team ranged in age from 19 to 59 years old, including 14 women and 12 men. They began their journey in Pickering's beautiful Frenchman's Bay at 12 p.m. last Saturday. The group paddled on the waters of Lake Ontario and Frenchman's Bay for the next 24 hours to establish the record, eclipsing the existing record by 39 kilometres.

Pickering Dragon Boat Club members regularly compete at local, national and international competitions and are very proud to represent the city of Pickering, the province of Ontario and our wonderful country through the spirit of sport.

I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature today head coach Scott Murray and team members paddler Suzanne and steerer Alexandra Hennig. Garrett McKinnon was hoping to join us but unfortunately can't be here today. So a shout-out on TV to Garrett. Congratulations to all of you and your club on your achievement.

LEADING GIRLS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like introduce this House to outstanding young women from my riding of Durham. They have been honoured and nominated for improving

the lives of their community. These young women, all under the age of 18, are positive role models and leaders in every sense of the word. They have been recognized with Leading Girls, Building Communities Awards.

Time does not allow me to give each detail about their accomplishments. However, the group includes several young women who have raised awareness and funds for medical research. One has received an international science award twice. Others have travelled overseas for humanitarian missions and helped their peers and their communities in all their volunteer activities.

Congratulations to the following Leading Girls: Madison Blenkinsop, Lauren Doorenspleet, Julia Gregg, Anissa Gregorio, Katharina Keays, Arielle Keene, Kathryn Lang, Jamie MacDonald, Rebecca MacDonald, Kaylin Morissette, Courtney Porter, Lauren Reid, Mikayla Robertson, Nelly Schurman, Sydney Schurman, Jessica Van Der Veer, Emma Ward, Siobhan Ward and Mikayla Witherspoon.

It was my distinct pleasure to have introduced those young women last night to over 500 people in my riding of Durham. We should all commend them and be proud of their achievements and wish them luck in their future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PERFORMANCE PAY AND BONUSES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ACT (MANAGEMENT AND EXCLUDED EMPLOYEES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LES PRIMES DE RENDEMENT ET AUTRES PRIMES DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC (CADRES ET EMPLOYÉS EXCLUS)

Mr. Bisson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act respecting performance pay and bonuses for management and excluded employees in the public sector / Projet de loi 118, Loi concernant les primes de rendement et autres primes versées aux cadres et aux employés exclus du secteur public.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Introduction of bills?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sorry. My apologies.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm beginning to think you're picking on me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): No.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Jeez, that's three times in two days.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, this bill enacts the Performance Pay and Bonuses in the Public Sector Act, 2012. The act provides that new or renewed employees contracted with certain employers within the public sector cannot be authorized for performance-for-pay bonuses.

Autrement dit, monsieur le Président, ce projet de loi donne l'habilité de s'assurer qu'il n'y a plus de—bonus?

M^{me} France Gélinas: De bonus.

M. Gilles Bisson: —de bonus, en français, excuse moi—qui soient payés après la date de ce projet de loi.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition. It's really on behalf of the constituents in northern Ontario and the hard work done by Vic Fedeli, the member from Nipissing. It reads as follows:

"Whereas, on April 22, 2002, Premier Dalton McGuinty signed a pledge in North Bay to never privatize the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC); and

"Whereas high energy prices have forced northern Ontario businesses to close or move, including Xstrata, which had moved its Timmins smelter operations to Quebec and had made up 10% of Ontario Northland railway's business; and

"Whereas some 60 lumber mills have closed across northern Ontario in recent years with a loss of 10,000 resource jobs, and Ontario fell from being the number one mining jurisdiction in the world to number 23 due to high taxes and government red tape, resulting in the erosion of Ontario Northland's commercial customer base; and

"Whereas the Far North Act that has banned development and turned much of northern Ontario into a virtual museum is the biggest barrier to new job creation in northern Ontario and cost Ontario Northland business; and

"Whereas the ONTC was completely omitted from the province's northern growth plan issued two years ago; and

"Whereas the former Liberal MPP for Nipissing staged an election campaign announcement on September 30, 2011, regarding what is now known to be a non-existent strategic alliance between the ONTC and Metro-linx;"—shameful—"and

"Whereas the government of Ontario, on March 23, 2012, announced it would wind down and divest itself of the ONTC and its assets with no prior consultation with community stakeholders in Nipissing and across north-eastern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, hereby demand the Premier come to North Bay and explain why he abandoned northern Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign and endorse this on behalf of those constituents and the MPP for Nipissing.

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RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition. I sign it and pass it on to page Roberto.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Today in the gallery, I have members from my community from the Rideau Carleton Raceway who have made the long trip from Ottawa. On behalf of them, I'd like to read these 10,000 signatures into the record on the following petition:

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion per year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Call on the government of Ontario to:

"(1) protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; and

"(2) direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I concur and agree wholeheartedly with this petition, and I affix my signature in support of the people of Nepean-Carleton, whom I proudly represent.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Paul Miller: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's cardiologists provide accessible, efficient, and cost-effective diagnostic testing services that save, and improve, the lives of thousands of people each year; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's unilateral, punitive changes to the OHIP fee schedule will result in the elimination of these crucial services, thereby leading to a reduction in patient access to care, the lengthening of waiting lists for services, the eradication of high-quality health professional jobs, and an increase in preventable deaths; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Cardiologists has presented an alternative, namely, the implementation of new, rigorous standards, which would ensure that cardiac diagnostic tests are done on the right patients, at the right time, by appropriately trained people, in accredited facilities, thereby reducing the number of inappropriate tests and leading to significant financial savings for the government; and

"Whereas the proposal has the endorsement of the highly respected Cardiac Care Network of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Direct the Ontario government to repeal the OHIP fee schedule regulation changes filed on May 7, 2012, and instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to work with the Ontario Association of Cardiologists to implement proposed cardiac diagnostic testing standards across the province."

I agree with this petition and will affix my name.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Safa.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a number of petitions that I'm also delivering on behalf of my colleague from Nepean-Carleton. I want to congratulate her on assembling thousands upon thousands upon thousands of signatures of people who are concerned about the horse racing industry.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario....

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion a year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Call on the Ontario government to:

"(1) protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; and

"(2) direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I support this petition, affix my name and send it down with Gopi.

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HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: This seems to be a recurring theme today. I guess it's telling the government something.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario's horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion a year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Call on the Ontario government to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I couldn't agree with this more. I will affix my name.

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

I have to address for a moment the people who are with us as guests in the visitors' gallery. We can't allow any clapping from the visitors' gallery, and I would ask

that you respect that rule of the Ontario Legislature. Thank you very much.

Petitions?

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Frank Klees: I too want to address this very important issue, having had many meetings with constituents whose investments and jobs are at stake on this issue. The petition reads:

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion a year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Call on the Ontario government to:

"(1) protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; and

"(2) direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I'm pleased to add my signature in support of this petition, and I know that the backbenchers of the government are embarrassed by this terrible, terrible—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? Are there any more petitions?

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Todd Smith: I too would like to stand on behalf of a number of my constituents in the Prince Edward-Hastings riding whose livelihoods and futures are at stake because of this move by the McGuinty government.

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion a year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Call on the government of Ontario to:

"(1) protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; and

"(2) direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I would also like to congratulate the member from Nepean-Carleton, Lisa MacLeod, for bringing forward her motion this afternoon, and we look forward to the support of the Legislature.

I will affix my name to this and hand it over to Jacqueline.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for petitions. Orders of the day.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT (ELECTION OF CHAIR OF YORK REGION), 2012 LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)

Mr. Moridi moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected / Projet de loi 60, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir que le président du conseil de la municipalité régionale de York doit être élu.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation, and I'm pleased again to recognize the member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today to present you and my honourable colleagues with Bill 60, which, if passed, will change the face of local politics in York region, and effectively my constituents in Richmond Hill.

I can say that I have had an interest in local politics all my life, and when I moved to Richmond Hill 22 years

ago, I was surprised to learn that the chair of the region is not an elected position. What is even more interesting is that the population of York region is over one million. Its growth rate of 22.4% from 2001 to 2006 was the third highest amongst all census divisions in Canada, and its population is expected to surpass 1.5 million residents by the year 2031.

My town of Richmond Hill, a lower-tier municipality, which has a population much less than a quarter of that of York region, is governed by an elected council, consisting of our mayor, two regional councillors and six ward councillors. These public officials have been elected by the constituents they serve and are accountable to the public at large.

You may ask: Who is the official that is the representative of almost one million constituents at the regional level? That will be the chair of the regional municipality of York. It may interest my honourable colleagues to note that this position, which was created in 1971, is not an elected position, and the person who holds this privilege of wearing the chain is appointed by the members of the regional council in a closed-door and non-transparent fashion.

I want to take this time to provide some background on York region and the position of the chair. The regional municipality of York is a regional municipality in southern Ontario between Lake Simcoe and the city of Toronto. There are nine municipalities that are included in York region. They are as follows: town of Aurora, town of East Gwillimbury, town of Georgina, township of King, city of Markham, town of Newmarket, town of Richmond Hill, city of Vaughan, and town of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The York regional council is the political body for the municipality of York region. It consists of 20 elected representatives, plus the politically appointed regional chair. The elected representatives are the nine mayors of each of the municipalities, plus 11 regional councillors.

The first time the York region chair was appointed by the provincial government was back in 1971, out of necessity to get the ball rolling. This happened when the population of York region was roughly 170,000 people, less than the present-day population of Richmond Hill alone. Since then, the chair has been appointed out of tradition, even though the population of the region is now over one million—more than the province of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and any of the Maritime provinces.

Interestingly enough, the York region chair is the only member of the regional council who is not elected and is, instead, appointed. He is appointed in a few short minutes behind closed doors by the 20 members of council to represent the over one million people and serve a four-year term.

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The current chair has been in office for the past 15 years. He has been unanimously appointed for five consecutive terms. The chair, who has the privilege of wearing the chain of the region, has not once had to turn to the people whom he represents and ask for their sup-

port, unlike every single member who sits on that council. Interestingly enough, the most important position in this growing region of over one million people is not an elected position.

Mr. Speaker, in this democratic country of ours, I see a big gap in democracy when it comes to the governance of the municipality of York region. This is a public office, a public position. The holder of this office acts as the political face when advocating on regional matters. It's also a position which, in case of a tie vote, has the power to break the tie, and as such change the direction of the council.

The chair, who is appointed by 20 people, has no method of accountability to any of the constituents in the municipality he or she represents. I would argue that with the election of the chair, we will bring that accountability and transparency to this office and will ensure there is fair representation.

I want to take this time to give a short synopsis of some of the duties, responsibilities and services that fall under the purview of the chair. The regional chair makes very important decisions, as he is the chief executive officer and chairman of council. As the CEO, the chair executes all activities and provides leadership in areas such as tactical and financial planning.

The chair has a budget of roughly \$2.8 billion, a budget bigger than some ministers have. This budget supports some of the following services: children's services, community planning, construction, corporate services, economic strategy and tourism, emergency medical services, environment, financial department, forestry, housing, infrastructure planning, legal services, long-term care and seniors, public health and safety, real estate, regional property taxes, transportation services, sewers, employment and financial support, transit, water, waste management, and policing. This is quite a lengthy list of some of the essential services that are under the purview of a position with no method of accountability to the public that it serves.

One can conclude from looking at the responsibilities, duties and, most significantly, scope of authority and the budget of the region that the position of chair is very much equivalent to a mayor's position. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine that the public would accept a politically appointed mayor for the city of Toronto or Richmond Hill?

As the population of cities continues to grow, more and more regions have started electing their regional chair in order for the chair to reflect the needs of the regions' constituents. Halton and Waterloo regions, unlike York region, directly elect their regional chairs and have a combined population less than that of York region. Durham region recently conducted a referendum where the residents were in support of direct election of their regional chair.

The conversation on the topic of election of the chair of Durham region has been taking place for over 10 years. It's important to note that this notion of a democratic process being introduced at the regional level

is not a new one, but one that is very much overdue, not only in York region but in all regions of this province.

The mayor of Ajax, Steve Parish, is a huge proponent of elimination of the status quo with respect to the position of regional chair. For over a decade, His Worship Steve Parish has advocated for change in Durham region, and he very pointedly addresses one of the main arguments against election of the chair, being the logistical issues of running a campaign over nine municipalities with no centralized medium for communication.

I quote Mr. Parish: "To me, this is very basic. It's just about democracy." And it also gives residents, who pay half of their taxes to the region, a say in deciding what the priorities of their community should be.

Since the introduction of this bill, this past spring, Mr. Speaker, I have received a tremendous amount of support from the residents of York region, former mayors and councillors within York region, voicing their strong support for the elimination of the status quo in our regional council.

This past July, the social planning council of York region organized a panel discussion that focused on the implementation of electing the regional chair of York region. The panellists included Professor Robert MacDermid, associate professor of political sciences at York University; Mr. Benjamin Earle, manager of the Community Development Council Durham; and myself. A constructive dialogue took place, and the constituents were able to not only show their support but also voice any concerns they may have had on the issue.

Former mayors of Richmond Hill Mr. Al Duffy and Mr. Bill Bell support the elimination of the status quo and the election of the chair.

The election of the chair must be transparent and democratic, a process that is open to the public at large, and should not be a political decision made behind closed doors. Mr. Speaker, we must bring democracy back to the regional council of York. The current process in place for the appointment of the regional chair is outdated.

My honourable colleagues, the sole purpose of this bill is to increase transparency and to bring forward the democratic process to the office of the chair of York region. I truly believe, as do some of my colleagues who will speak in support of this bill, that the holder of this position should be elected by the residents of York region rather than being appointed behind closed doors in a non-transparent method by members of regional council.

I ask my colleagues in this House to vote in favour of this bill and bring democracy back to York region. Mr. Speaker, one million residents of York region deserve a chair accountable to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm delighted to add a few words to this debate.

The first thing I want to say is congratulations to my colleague from Richmond Hill. We are in agreement on

this, and I certainly will be supporting this bill during the vote. It's high time.

I have been the recipient of an honour in representing the riding of Thornhill in the region of York for the past five years, as the Speaker knows and as most people in this House know. Interestingly, in doing so, I represent significant portions of two of the major cities in York region, Vaughan and Markham—by far the dominant cities in York region, you could say.

Mr. Frank Klees: Hey!

Mr. Peter Shurman: I know my colleague from Newmarket—Aurora has some questions about that, but you'll get your turn.

A few facts about York region that bear repetition have been raised by my friend from Richmond Hill. York region is now—and we like to brag about this—home to over one million people. This is very significant, and by far the largest aspect of growth that we can see all over Ontario—in terms of businesses, in terms of individuals, individual homes and so forth. And as he appointed out, by 2031 we expect that to go up another 50%, to 1.5 million. We see high-rises, we see additional single-family units being put up as we speak, and more to come.

We also see in the past week a revelation that new ridings are being defined at the federal level, which will affect us in this Legislature—a number of them coming to York region. Why? Because of this significant growth in population. It is the sixth-largest Canadian municipality by population—the sixth-largest, Speaker. At \$43 billion, the economy of York region is larger than the economies of four Canadian provinces, with an annual budget, managed by the chair of York region, of \$2.8 billion—not an insignificant sum.

With the size and the complexity of this region, it is a tall order to govern York region effectively, and it is important that all politicians of all political stripes ensure civic democracy is upheld and is embraced. And that is embodied by the concept of this very short, very simple but very poignant bill that says in a line or two that we should have a democratically elected chair of York region. The chair in York region, the chair of any region, and certainly one of this size, has incredible and, if I may say, sweeping powers, with not very much accountability, and I think it is reasonable to characterize that position as more than a chair; it's almost like a czar.

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Having said that, I don't want to bring in personalities, so I will acknowledge the fact that the chair of York region, for many years now, has been Mr. Bill Fisch. He's a good politician, he's a good man, he's done a good job, and we're not debating whether he has or he hasn't. We're debating the fact that a small circle of people, as my friend from Richmond Hill pointed out, elect Mr. Fisch, and Mr. Fisch has no reason to answer directly to electors; they haven't cast a ballot for him.

So decisions regarding the services that have been elaborated on, like housing and health care, regional roads, transportation, police, have to be based on input from regular, everyday citizens in York region or any-

where else, and right now, that is a very indirect process that works through mayors and regional councillors.

The York Region Transit strike, which was the subject of a bill that I brought before this Legislature back in the fall—and a strike that endured for about four months, causing great hardship during the winter—was an illustration of why I believe we should have had an elected chair who was directly accountable to individuals. York region residents were not able to get their kids to school in that case, and families, businesses and the economy all suffered.

Durham region has seen the light and has decided that an elected chair is the way to go. I think I will finish by simply leaving that point hanging in the air and saying that the same should exist for a region that is, by far, undergoing the greatest growth curve ever, and will continue to do so for the next 15 or 20 years. We need an elected chair in York region.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Moridi, I thank you very much for bringing this bill forward. I personally will be supporting it when it comes to a vote this afternoon.

We realize that this bill is contentious. We realized, from what we read in the newspapers, especially in York region, that there are those in York region who are not supporting your bill. We realize that some politicians have a vested interest in keeping things the way that they are, and we also understand that some municipalities feel uncomfortable that the larger-populated municipalities, with more voters, will have more sway and determination in determining who the regional chair ultimately is for York region. But I think we need to debate this here today, and we need to pass this.

For those who are the least bit squeamish about it, rest assured that the first thing that happens will be the debate in this Legislature and, should the bill get third and final reading, there are still two other citizen referenda that need to take place. First of all, the regional council is going to have to agree to this, and a majority of the local councils—the third tier—are going to have to agree as well. So it is a process that's going to take some time, but I welcome the opportunity to talk about why its time has come.

I go back to my old days as a mayor and my appointment to the regional council as it then was, which was Metro council—

Interjection: It wasn't that long ago.

Mr. Michael Prue: It was a few years ago. When Metro council was first set up in Toronto, it was very much the same as the regional councils around the other parts of the province. They were all set up using the old county warden system, but I want to say that they are very different from the warden system, and those who live in rural Ontario and who have a warden ought not to equate them the same way.

After a number of years with people being appointed by the local councils and being sent down to Metro, it was determined by the Legislature that the system really

wasn't working for Toronto, and a system was set up which allowed for direct election of regional councillors. There wasn't a direct election of the chair, although I am sure, had Metro council continued to this day, that would now be done. But what there was was an opportunity for some 26 people to be elected in their respective constituencies, and the six mayors also had a seat on the Metro council as well. From amongst that group of 32 people, a person was chosen to be the chair.

It worked. People used to come from all over the world to see the city that worked. It worked because there were six individual municipalities that ran the local day-to-day affairs and had control over planning in their respective neighbourhoods. It worked because there was an overarching body, Metro council, which did the big things that needed to be done, everything from the police force to water and sewers and those kinds of things, so that the city worked. People came from all over the world to discover that, and they need to come from all over the world to see how it will work in York region as well.

Part of the way that that happens is that the tradition has to be democratic. Durham region, in the last municipal election, overwhelmingly voted for an elected regional chair. I think it makes sense, because someone who speaks on behalf of the entire region—and, in many of the places, they wear a chain of office. I think they wear one in York region. Does Bill Fisch have a chain of office? I think he does. A big chain of office—well, that is the person who is the spokesperson for the region, and if you are going to have that kind of authority and wear that kind of chain of office, then I think the covenant has to come from the people, not from some 20 individuals who are elected in their own right.

I want to confirm and echo what my colleague from Thornhill had to say. I have known Bill Fisch for some 20 years. He is a competent and good politician. He is a bright man. He is very capable in terms of reaching out to consensus from the 20 people whom he chairs at meetings, and I have no doubt that should he want to continue in this role and run for regional chair, there are many who would vote for him. But in the end, if you do not have that covenant with the people, if you are simply the appointee of some 20 individuals who make that decision, usually behind closed doors—and I don't know how the vote is held, whether it's by a show of hands or if it's by secret ballot. But in any event, you need to have that covenant of being elected. I cannot imagine a mayor in any one of the 445 municipalities of this province saying, "I am the mayor, and I was chosen without any kind of democratic tradition. The council just simply came along and said, 'Will you be our mayor?'" and people would accept that as being right. It cannot be right. We have a system of government in this province. We have a federal government. We have a provincial government. In many places where we don't have a single tier, we have two-tier municipal governments, and all of them need to have a democratic tradition.

The issue, to my mind, has to be giving the people the ultimate authority to make the decisions. If you are afraid

of the people as a politician, you ought not to be in this game, you ought not to be here, because every election, every time you go out to a meeting or anything, you have to listen to them, you have to co-operate with them, you have to understand with them. Ultimately, if you don't agree with them, you have to have the courage of your own conviction to explain that. That's why I am asking that a regional chair must do the same thing.

We ought not, as I said earlier, to confuse this with the warden system. In much of rural Ontario we have county wardens. The warden's job, traditionally, has been for one year. So in a four-year term, as we have now municipally across the province, you may have as many as four wardens in a single term. Somebody will do it for a year—it's a ceremonial position. Someone will do it for the second year and the third year. Some wardens, I know, are there for all four years, but many are not. But this is a four-year term. A lot happens politically in four years, and if you are going to occupy that same seat for four years, you ought to do it.

I am mindful that this is a process that has taken place across all of Ontario over an extended period of time. Metro council is no longer there. Following amalgamation, we went to a single tier, but I am confident that would have changed. I also know the same thing happened in Hamilton-Wentworth. They had an elected chair, but of course following the amalgamation of Hamilton with some of the municipalities, Stoney Creek and others around them, that, too, went away.

But you have other regional municipalities. We have Halton. We have Waterloo. We have other regional municipalities that have already seized this. We have Durham, which has had a vote, and Peel, which in 2014 is going to join that rank.

1400

I believe that this Legislature has an obligation to all of the people of Ontario and especially, at this juncture and in this debate, to all the people of York region. If democracy is good enough for electing someone to this Legislature, then democracy has to be the key aspect in electing someone to the regional chair.

Canada prides itself around the world on talking about democracy and human rights. When we go to parliamentary conferences or other conferences, we often are critical of places where they take away the rights of people to vote. When we see, in dictatorships or in less-than-free elections in some countries, the kind of aspects we would not tolerate here—people stuffing ballot boxes, opposition parties not being allowed to run, candidates not allowed to put their names forward, people not having a choice between two individuals or two parties where you have one-party systems in some countries—we are critical of that.

In order for us to stand tall in this Legislature, in order for us to do the right thing, I think we need to pass, at second reading, Mr. Moridi's bill today, and in so doing, I think we need to tell people that we think the highest principle of all is that of democracy and of letting people decide what they can do with their ballot and who they

want to be their leaders. If there are those who oppose this, if it passes second reading, then I expect this bill, as all bills, will go to committee. I invite those people who think there are priorities other than democracy at play here to come forward and tell us what they are.

Is it going to be expensive to run a campaign to be regional chair across a whole region? It can be, but it need not be. People can make decisions without having thousands of TV ads and all the paraphernalia. They know who the players are, and they know who they want their leaders to be. I certainly know that an election can be held and should be held that doesn't cost the earth.

I want to leave a minute and a half or so for my colleague Mr. Miller to speak to this as well. I ask all the members: Please, in the name of democracy and in the name of the people of York region, who really, really should be able to choose their own leaders, pass this bill. Let's send it to committee and let's make sure that this is one of the last vestiges of a non-democratic system left in this province. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 60, brought forward by my colleague, my neighbour, the member for Richmond Hill. It's been stated that the population of York region is 1.1 million. Of those individuals, some 230,000 live in the riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, and in fact I represent four municipalities out of the nine. The issue for me is in fact to echo what has been said. It's all about representative democracy. I believe that in our society we value representative democracy, and in the case of the selection of the regional chair in York region, that is clearly absent.

I have, as a former employee of the region, and since my election, attended eight inaugural meetings of regional council. This is a meeting that's held following the municipal election after each term of office of municipal councillors to select the chair of York region. Of those eight occasions I attended, there was only one where there was more than one candidate proposed. In other words, in the other seven, there was only one nomination and an acclamation of the regional chair, and in all those cases, that individual had not been elected in the previous municipal process. There was only one occasion, in 1997, when in fact three members, duly elected in their municipalities, were nominated for the position of regional chair. In fact, to answer our colleague from Beaches–East York's question, they were elected by a show of hands, with all the potential that that involves; in other words, no type of secret ballot whatsoever, even among those 20 individuals on regional council.

I think the average person in York region is really unaware of the scope, the role, of the regional chairman. It was brought home to me during the York Region Transit strike. I think all of us members from York region received many different phone calls from individuals to our constituency offices, obviously hoping for an end to the strike. In explaining the role of the regional chairman

in terms of his authority when it came to regional transit, the majority of my constituents just didn't understand this. They had no concept of the importance of the role of that individual.

It's partly, in York region, a difficult role to understand because services are provided in really quite a unique way in York region. Garbage collection—curbside garbage—is actually the responsibility of the local municipality, so if your garbage isn't picked up, of course, you phone your local town or city. What is not understood is that the whole waste management process beyond that curbside pickup is in fact the responsibility of the region. It's very similar for water distribution pipes. What comes into your home, the distribution to your home, is actually the responsibility of the local municipality, whereas the provision of potable water is the responsibility of the region. So when you have something that directly affects you, you spend your time phoning your local municipality, and you're completely unaware of this massive responsibility that in fact the region has.

For me, this is all about representative democracy. I think we value citizen engagement in the process. There's an opportunity for candidates for regional chair to put forward their proposal for the next four years for the region; in other words, to espouse a particular platform. The citizens are to be engaged and, at the end of the four years, are to hold that particular individual accountable, obviously through an election process, and to give a report card on that individual's performance.

It's not about the individual who has been mentioned. I worked for Bill Fisch for many long years. He has made this a full-time job. He is passionately committed to the region. This is all about representative democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to join the debate on Bill 60, the proposal from my colleague the MPP for Richmond Hill to hold a direct election for the chair of York region. Let me say at the outset that I intend to support this bill, and I look forward to it moving forward for public debate and consultation.

I think all of us agree that the key to representative democracy is just that: An election is the best way to make sure that representative democracy is being met—the demands.

According to media reports, York region's municipalities are split on the idea of direct election, and York region council itself has voted down the idea. I'd put that in the context, as well, of the many other regions that have chosen to go in this direction. Perhaps there needs to be more understanding of the way in which it's done.

I also want to make sure that people understand that my support for this has nothing to do with the current chair. The current chair, Bill Fisch, has always received strong support from the council and has been re-elected by the council unanimously the last three times. I've worked with him on a number of issues and always found him to be helpful to me and to my constituents.

My biggest concern about a directly elected chair is, quite frankly, the manner in which it's done, because I represent the municipalities at the northern end of York region, which have smaller populations than the ones at the southern end. If we were to take the raw numbers, obviously a potential candidate for chair could get virtually all the votes he needs in the southern part of York region without any kind of consideration for the northern part. Obviously, I would find that not to be appropriate. We have to look at making sure there's a mechanism that recognizes the differences.

Just to name one, the role of agriculture in the municipalities that I represent is just a simple example. We've already dealt—and I know in this chamber I have dealt—with the issue and raised a resolution a few years ago on the underfunding by the province of the high-growth areas, particularly of York region, so I don't want to see this then become an issue that gets replicated on a municipal level in any reconfiguration.

1410

I might also remind members that when Ottawa and Hamilton were amalgamated, there were concerns, but the population disparities between city and suburb were nowhere near as great as they are in York region between north and south. So I think there are a lot of questions to be dealt with on the broader basis of the governance and the manner in which this election would take place. Before we move to a direct election, we need to be absolutely sure that the system would work better than we have now, and for everyone in York region.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: The member from Beaches—East York left me at least a minute. I'd like to get in quickly.

There are only two regions left that have an unelected chair, and those are Peel and Niagara. I hope they follow suit. We certainly support this endeavour—full support from our caucus.

Let's face it: Democracy rules. People should be elected in those types of positions. I'm sure that Mr. Fisch does a great job, and he's probably very credible. But, you know, when you don't have to answer to the voting public, it certainly gives you a safe zone where you don't feel challenged or you don't feel like if you say the wrong thing you're going to pay at election time.

So I think this is a good thing. It's a good endeavour. Certainly, in our region, in Hamilton region, we had an elected chair, Terry Cooke, at the time. He was an excellent chair, but he certainly knew that he had to answer to the people of Hamilton, who are very outspoken and will certainly let you know when you're doing the wrong thing. He listened to them on more than one occasion, and maybe went against his better judgment or maybe some of the groups that he favoured privately he might have gone the other way, but through pressure from the public he did the right thing. So I really feel that this is a great thing, and I commend the member for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very happy to rise today and to speak in support of my colleague from Richmond Hill's private member's bill, Bill 60. I understand, and I'm hearing, that the bill has the support of members opposite. This is great to see.

The bill is quite simply about democracy, as others have said, and the ability of York region constituents to directly elect one of their most influential government leaders. Regional councils provide services to residents and businesses. Their responsibilities include making decisions on residential and commercial development, regional transit and roads, waste management, policing, emergency services and social services. York region consists of 20 elected reps, plus the regional chair, overseeing a population of well over a million people. York residents and businesses will pay \$2.8 billion for the services administered by the region, which is more than the budget of some provincial ministries, as mentioned earlier.

Clearly, much has changed in York region since the chair was first appointed out of necessity by the province in 1971. At the time, the inaugural chair was appointed by provincial cabinet. However, it was never intended to be a perpetually appointed position. As chief executive officer of council, the regional chairperson provides leadership in all areas of planning and represents the region around the table at the provincial and federal levels of government.

Let me be clear on one point, Speaker: I speak today not to challenge the record of the chairperson of York or any chair of any region in Ontario, but in support of legislation making the office of the York region chairperson an elected position. In my home region of Durham, which has a population just over half of that of York region, a referendum on direct election of Durham's regional chairperson was held last municipal election, where over 80% of voters voted in favour of direct election. After receiving the required triple majority, Durham region constituents will be electing their regional chairperson in the 2014 municipal election. Durham will join Waterloo and Halton region in directly electing their chairs. I do stand in support of this bill.

I would like to add one more point—not directly related to the bill, but which I think is very important. Others have alluded to this: that it does appear that it's a very expensive undertaking to run an election of this magnitude at a regional level. I feel strongly about accessibility to elected positions. It may be time to rethink and look at the rules and regulations around that, because I think to have good representatives, we have to make elected positions accessible to all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to rise in support of this bill. I want to thank my colleague the member for Richmond Hill for bringing it forward.

It's interesting; I wrote a column in May of this year, and the headline of that column was about why you couldn't vote for the most powerful politician in York region, and it was all about this issue. What was interesting is all the feedback that I had. No one in York region realized that the chair was not elected. They see Mr. Fisch everywhere. They see him wearing the chain of office. They know that he is a spokesperson for York region. They assumed that at some point he also had to be elected. Well, that isn't the case.

I consider Bill Fisch a good friend. He has done an excellent job. But this is all about democracy, it's about transparency and it's about accountability. I believe particularly, as was said already, given the growth of York region over the last number of years and what will be continued growth, there is a need for us to have the chair of that region fully accountable and supported by direct election.

I also want to just add this to the discussion. I know that Mr. Fisch today has the title of chair and CEO. I fundamentally believe that that is a conflict. I believe that there's a role for a chief executive officer, whether it be at the municipal level or whether that be at a corporate level. The functions of a chair are very different from the functions of a CEO, and I believe, particularly with the complexity of the business that is being done at the region of York, that it will be in the best interests of that individual to have those functions separated. So I will support this.

I think the arguments that are being made about the fact that you have to be able to represent rural parts of the region as well as urban parts—look, many of us have the same issue. There have been times when I've represented parts of York region where I've had to represent urban and, at the same time, rural areas. That is our responsibility. We have the ability to assess the differences of our communities, and at the end we're charged with making the right decision, making the decision that is in the best interests of all of the people we represent, and that would be the responsibility of a directly elected chair.

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity. Again I want to say thank you to my colleague. Our critic for municipal affairs will also add his comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I want to begin by commending the member from Richmond Hill for bringing this bill forward. From what I've heard this afternoon, it's going to meet with the pleasure of the House. I think that's a good thing when we can all support an initiative like this.

It's an idea that I support, and it's based on my local experience. Prior to serving at Queen's Park, I spent 18 years in the capacity of a regional councillor in the region of Halton and for the town of Oakville. When I was first elected—it was 1984 or 1985—I was still in my twenties. One of the first things we had to do as a council was go in a little side room off the council chambers, quite similar to the lobbies we have here, and we decided who

the chair was going to be. In the region of Halton at that point in time, the chair had to be somebody who had just been elected a few weeks ago. You would pick somebody from amongst the council. There would be a vote held in the lobby, and then there would be another formal vote held in the council chamber. I was uncomfortable with that. I voiced my discomfort with it, but as a young 20-something-year-old and the new kid on the block, I wasn't really listened to.

1420

Fast-forward to the mid-1990s: I raised the issue again, and it started to gather some support. Certainly, I sensed it had support among the electorate. It was actually the former member for Burlington who became the regional chair. She wasn't first elected as regional chair; she was appointed as regional chair. She had the fortitude to stand up and support the notion that the chair for the region of Halton should be elected. It's something we've become used to in the region of Halton and the town of Oakville. It's something that works really well.

I know that some people have raised the concern that by having an elected chair you strengthen the region at the expense of the smaller communities. In my experience, exactly the opposite is true. We've got four municipalities in the region of Halton: We've got Oakville, we've got Burlington, we've got Milton and we've got Halton Hills. I don't think any one of them feels their individual voices have been stifled at the expense of the region.

The region of Halton, in my estimation, is a municipality that works extremely well. It's got people who are very dedicated, and it's got what I think is a very accountable chair at the regional level in Gary Carr, not just because of the individual he is, and having sat in the chair you're occupying right now, Speaker—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: He's a great guy.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: He is a great guy, and he's done a very good job and goes out of his way to ensure that each municipality is heard from. But every four years, like you and me, Speaker, he has to go out and face the electorate in the region of Halton.

What I think it has done is two things. It has made the level of government and the system of government far more accountable, but it also—I think another speaker this afternoon said that the people they were speaking to didn't realize that the regional chair in York was not elected. In this case, what I think it does is raise the profile of the region at election time. It makes regional issues become election issues. It gets people talking about what the region should be doing and shouldn't be doing.

I know that Durham has joined Halton and Waterloo regions recently, and they will hold a direct election for the chair's position.

I want to thank the member from Richmond Hill today for bringing forward this idea. I think it's an idea that has the support of not only the members of the House from all three parties; I think if you did some public opinion polling, you'd find that the electors in York region would

also support this. It's a basic right. Those people who have the privilege of representing you should also have the privilege of earning your vote. People in Halton have that now. People in Niagara and Waterloo regions have it. Durham will have it. There's no reason in my mind that the people of York region shouldn't have the same level of accountability that other people in the province of Ontario enjoy.

Once again, my thanks to the member from Richmond Hill for bringing this forward. I'll be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I only have a few seconds to provide my comments, but I, as our party's critic, do support this bill presented by Mr. Moridi, the member for Richmond Hill. I think it speaks to the very core of our democracy.

We just came from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference. I did have the chance to speak with Mr. Carr and also Mr. Seiling from Waterloo region. I know the experience they've had in their regions, and I know that the politicians in Durham are very excited about this, and about their opportunity as well.

As many members have said today, the folks in York region—many of them—have looked at this as a very positive change, so I hope that members will support this legislation. And perhaps we can expand it at some point down the road for all regions in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe the time has lapsed for all three parties, so I now return to the member for Richmond Hill, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Reza Moridi: I want to begin by thanking my honourable colleagues from Thornhill, Beaches–East York, Oak Ridges–Markham, York Simcoe, Pickering–Scarborough East, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Newmarket–Aurora, Oakville and Leeds–Grenville for their support and eloquent speeches about this bill.

This bill, as my colleagues mentioned in their presentations to this House, is about democracy. It's about transparency. It's about accountability. That's supported by the popular vote of over one million residents of York region. The point which is sometimes raised against a popular vote—people say, "The chair is going to be elected from the people in the southern part of York region, where the majority of the population resides." The fact of the matter is that the current chair resides in the southern part of York region, in the city of Markham, for the past 15 years, so that is not really a valid point.

The other point which is sometimes raised is that the regional council should have a say on this. This is again not a valid point, because we are amending the Municipal Act. The municipalities, as we all know, are a creation of the province. Therefore, it is for us to make a decision to bring democracy back to York region.

I urge every one of my colleagues in this House to vote for this bill. I look forward to passing this bill and it becoming law so that in 2014, when we are going to have municipal elections, the residents of York region will

elect their chair and CEO of York region. This is about democracy. I want to thank every member who supported my bill, and I look forward to the passing of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take a vote on this item at the end of regular business.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I move that, in the opinion of this House, Ontario's Auditor General must review the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.'s new gaming plans, including its revenue and expenditure projections, mental health and addictions impact and its effect on Ontario's horse racing industry, and further that a referendum take place in any affected municipality where the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. is proposing a new casino in order for the community to determine whether it is welcome or not.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This day has been a long time coming for me, particularly since the last Ontario budget had indicated that it was going to have a new approach, through the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., for gaming in our province.

I want to acknowledge the many people who have arrived here today in support of this resolution. They come from across Ontario, as far away as Ottawa, my home community, as well as Sarnia, Wingham—they're here from everywhere, because they're as concerned as I am, and as many are in this House, that we're proceeding on a radical shift in gaming in Ontario without all of the information.

There are a number of issues I want to talk about in the very short period of time I have to address this. I want to talk about gaming and its impact on mental health and addictions, and the accessibility that might occur if we're to proceed very quickly without due diligence on increasing gaming in downtown locations.

I want to talk about the horse racing industry, and the impact it's going to have on 60,000 jobs across Ontario for hard-working, everyday people who probably never really wanted to come to Queen's Park in their life but now feel that their entire livelihood is at stake.

Finally, Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about oversight and the requirement for it at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. We've talked about it many times here in this assembly because, as we all know, over the years they've had quite a few troubles, spanning three different governments from three different political parties. I don't think, when we're talking about taxpayer dollars, we're talking about people's jobs and we're talking about mental health and addiction, that we shouldn't have that conversation right here.

Speaker, I represent Nepean–Carleton, as you know. It is the largest riding in the city of Ottawa, both in popu-

lation and geography. In fact, recently the government of Canada announced that my riding would be split in two in the next federal election, due to its population. What does that really mean? It means I've got a strong urban and suburban component, but I also have a very large, vibrant and wonderful agricultural community.

1430

When I first became the MPP for Nepean–Carleton in 2006, I became very well acquainted with an institution that turned 50 years old this year, the Rideau Carleton Raceway. I started going there for community events. I must admit, I'm not a gambler or wagerer myself. I'm a cheap Scot. My last name's MacLeod. I'm probably the stereotype. But I do go to the track quite a bit because, no matter what night of the week it is, you can go to the Rideau Carleton Raceway and you can find a community organization raising money for a night at the races. Then, as the winter and the fall became time for our spring session, the Gloucester Fair would host its annual agricultural traditional fair at the Rideau Carleton Raceway.

What I learned about this institution is it was much more than just about slots. It had everything to do with a tradition and a culture that is vibrant right across this great province. It's there because farmers have embraced it. It's there because people from the cities find it a refreshing way to spend a Sunday afternoon, to see a traditional agricultural event.

I came to know that the Rideau Carleton Raceway was much more than just slots and horses. There were people behind those horses. They were breeders. They were horse racers. They were big animal veterinarians. They were farmers who raised oats and hay. There were young people putting themselves through Carleton University and the University of Ottawa waiting tables. I'd be ashamed to see 1,000 of those jobs wiped away in Nepean–Carleton because the Rideau Carleton Raceway isn't viable anymore.

So, Mr. Speaker, in that vein, I became very concerned in March. In fact, I was at an airport with my daughter and I ran into Dalton McGuinty after this had been announced, and I remember my daughter ran over to him to talk to him. As you know, his riding is next door. She knows who he is. She knows who Tim Hudak is, and Andrea Horwath, and she thinks Andrea is prettier than both of them.

She ran over to talk to him, and I remember I couldn't bring myself to talk to him because I was so concerned about this issue. I whipped off a quick email to my colleagues talking about what we needed to talk about with respect to this gaming plan, because there's another piece to this puzzle.

After gaming became easily accessible in my native Nova Scotia, I had a family member who became extraordinarily, extremely addicted to gaming and lost her shirt. Then that went to the next generation and it happened to her son. I saw first-hand what accessibility to gaming can do to a family and a community when it is not done properly.

So the other issue I have with this—and I think it really is required that we have a debate. We have to have a public debate to have that conversation about downtown casinos and how that will impact our communities regarding mental health and addiction. Are those resources there?

The best person to do that is the Auditor General, and I want to talk about the Auditor General for a moment. We know, for example, that he's done in recent years a couple of reports on the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. We know, for example, that that agency has had massive challenges with its own expenses for its employees, but also with how it was dealing with its risk assessments.

In a report not too long ago, the Auditor General said that "commission inspectors at three of the four gaming facilities we tested were unable to complete their goal of inspecting all slot machines, and gaming audit and compliance inspectors were also behind schedule in verifying that gaming facilities were in compliance with approval requirements and their internal control manuals. The commission needed to improve its risk assessments to allow it to focus more of its audit inspection staff on higher-risk gaming facilities and less on lower-risk facilities."

What's it's saying there, Speaker—and I think you would agree with me—is that a higher-risk facility is going to be a downtown casino; a lower-risk facility is going to be a place where they have been gaming and wagering for 50 years because it's as much a part of its culture and tradition as it is about gaming.

Speaker, I can't tell you enough how concerning this is to me that just two years ago, the Auditor General was saying that the OLG wasn't meeting its compliance demands then. What are they going to do when they bring in MGM and all of these other big casinos like Caesars and put them into Ottawa and into Belleville without doing their due diligence? That's a debate and discussion we have to have here, and it's one that can be best informed by the Auditor General.

I can't say enough that there are social risks, and the auditor has spoken about this previously as well. He says, "Social risks need to be managed to ensure that customers gamble responsibly within their limits to avoid dire financial and family consequences, and to prevent criminal elements from exploiting casinos with illegal activities such as money laundering and loansharking, and from controlling goods-and-services supply chains used by casinos." He also says that the full-time presence of the OPP must be at all casinos.

Speaker, I think this is very prophetic in that the Auditor General, in his review a few years ago, looked into some of the concerns that we are now having across Ontario. As I was saying to one of my colleagues in the NDP just today—and I'm proud that they have decided to support this resolution, and I thank them for that—it almost seems that in the political system, particularly here in the Ontario Legislature, we can't fill these galleries for a public discussion until someone's livelihood

is at stake, and we don't have that conversation, that full public debate, that full-blown discussion of how to proceed on a very important piece of legislation.

I know many colleagues will reiterate my concerns over the horse racing industry, and I want to thank those who came to Queen's Park from all over Ontario today to be here, because I share their concerns. I share their fears.

In the recent report by the transition panel, we were told that 13,000 horses would have to be killed. They said that if the slots are removed from the racetracks, the racetracks wouldn't have a viable business plan. They've had a revenue-sharing arrangement for over a decade that has been successful. At the beginning, the slots actually cannibalized the horse racing industry; now there's a mutually beneficial partnership that's being taken away. What is at stake? Well, basically, \$1.2 billion in revenue that goes to pay for our schools and our hospitals and to keep the lights on in this place. What's at stake? Some 60,000 jobs, 1,000 in the city of Ottawa alone, and for what? Five hundred for a casino downtown, with all of the risks that we haven't debated here in this assembly?

Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to stand here today—there may be elements you like or don't like in this motion, but at the end of the day, we are the guardians of the public purse and we are the guardians of public discourse in Ontario. It is up to us to ask the tough questions. It is up to us to make sure that those charged with legislative duties in this assembly can carry them out. That's why I think the best way to proceed with these new plans by OLG—with the consequences that we know are there—is to ask Ontario's auditor to review those plans, to look at the human impact, to look at the economic impact and to look at what it's going to do to jobs that are already out there in Ontario, because that's what we owe to Ontario residents.

I will say one final thing in the time I have left. A few months ago, my colleague Lisa Thompson had a motion here in the assembly, and I saw this assembly divide on a rural-and-urban divide. I don't want that to happen, Speaker. I think this is an issue that is important to every single Ontarian, and I appeal to all members here today to appeal back to every single Ontarian. Thank you very much. I appreciate your support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From the outset, I want to inform you that I'll be sharing my time with some of my colleagues here, so, whatever is left over, they will decide how to split that up.

It's a pleasure to join the debate today, one that has been ongoing since, really, the beginning of the session, the first session of this House, somewhere back in October last year.

1440

The government made a drastic decision without any input from the majority of the stakeholders that are intimately involved in this industry. Who are those stakeholders, Mr. Speaker? They are the rural families in

our communities, the mothers, fathers, sons, daughters who work in this wonderful industry, a historic industry for this province, one that's so special. In fact, if you look at it, it's special in the sense that it can't be outsourced. It can't be offshored to another jurisdiction. These are good-paying, tangible, regional jobs with good skills, and wholesome, too, as well. They identify our regions as being special. That's why, again, they are so special to us in this caucus, those of us who live in rural ridings and represent rural ridings, because we know how much they mean to the people but also to the economy, that interconnectedness with not only those who work directly in the industry, the veterinarians, the farriers, the farmers, the feed suppliers, all of those who work at the track, but also the truck sales, the equipment sales, the heavy equipment—all the aspects of this industry that come into play that make it such an important part of our economy.

That's why today I am pleased to stand with the member from Nepean—Carleton to support her bill. One of the things I've learned, as a new member, is to look at the intent of each bill as it enters into this House and into the chamber. I see the intent as being fair, infusing some real measures of scrutiny and accountability through the Auditor General to expand the powers, expand the oversight, of the AG to look at the direction of the OLG and where they're heading. That's, I guess, why we're talking about this and why we think this decision, overall, has been made.

The economic rationale, to date, has not been made and not been fully nuanced, at least for myself and members of this side of the opposition. No one here understands the economic decision that has been made, unless—and I've learned something else: that when nothing else makes sense, follow the money. It's very basic. We see that there are forces outside of our traditional gaming entities that are pursuing a direction of full privatization, of eliminating the government's intervention, the government's responsibility and the government's benefit from gaming in Ontario. We see it happening in the bingo halls. We see it happening with large casino magnates who are making overtures in terms of bidding on licences that have been proposed. They see money. Obviously, gaming comes with a whole host of socio-economic issues and impacts, but the benefit is that the house wins, and if you are the house, as the province of Ontario is, you get to use that revenue and put it into different programs. As we know, this program, slots at racetracks, has been so successful—\$1.3 billion a year. Leveraging that \$345 million that has been generated through the slots—leveraging that into \$1.3 billion a year that goes into paying for the schools and the hospitals and the roads, bridges, tunnels, sewers and everything that we need to have to live in a cohesive society.

I wonder why that direction is being taken. Why are you abandoning your role as stewards of gaming, as the governors, as the regulators, and opening the doors to the private casinos? We see it in Windsor. Just days after the decision to take the slots out of the Windsor racetrack—

just days after that decision was made, Casino Windsor, which is operated by Caesars, laid off 27 workers, just two days after that decision was made. The finance minister justified his decision to pull those slots out of that racetrack because he needed to save jobs at the Windsor casino, but yet we see jobs still being lost, so that rationale doesn't make sense.

I would like to also point to some issues I have with the Conservative Party's position on gaming. Specifically, the leader of the Conservative Party was asked about his party's official position on gaming in Ontario, and ultimately, I see a statement by Mr. Hudak that they should let government regulate it and look after the interests of honest players while getting the government out of the actual slots portion of the operation by privatizing it.

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You may applaud, but I do not see anything different in that statement than what the Liberals are proposing to do. I don't understand. If you're going to let—

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: We're having a proper discourse here. If we're saying that they're letting the private gaming entities come into this province and you're going to privatize the whole thing, then tell me how MGM and Caesars are going to broker a deal with the horse racing associations of this province. I don't see it happening, but if you're willing to make the gamble, then good luck on you.

The program, as it was stated, worked for rural Ontario. It worked for the people in rural Ontario, and it made sense. Any direction outside of keeping that entity in public hands is a gamble that I am not willing to take, and I hope that the government sees the light on their decision and reverses their decision immediately.

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I just want to remind the members of the public in the gallery that we welcome you here to observe the proceedings, but I would ask you to refrain from any kind of applause or cheering, as I've noticed a few of you indulging in. Thank you.

Further debate? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion, and I appreciate the member for Nepean—Carleton bringing this motion forward. I'm sure the member knows that the Auditor General has it within his mandate to investigate any entity in the broader public service.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Any time he wants.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Any time he wants. So I'm not sure whether this motion is really needed, because the Auditor General has the capacity to undertake a value-for-money audit, as per the legislation, of any entity in the broader public sector whenever he wishes. In fact, the member from Nepean—Carleton, earlier in her comments, spoke of the Auditor General's work in OLG some years ago, looking at its functions and giving recommendations to

the government, which the government has implemented. So that's there, and I think it's important to keep that in mind, that the Auditor General is free—and, of course, we always welcome the work of the Auditor General. He and his staff do thorough work, and his recommendations are always appreciated.

But what I really want to talk about at this juncture, regarding this motion, is the issue around priorities. It was this morning when the member for Nepean—Carleton, speaking on the motion dealing with full-day kindergarten, was making this argument about how we're in tough economic times, there is no money, there's a \$15-billion deficit and the government should not invest anything in full-day kindergarten, that a full-day kindergarten program is way too expensive, that we should take away that program and should not benefit our four- and five-year-old children from both rural communities and urban communities. But when it comes to spending \$345 million through the slots-at-racetracks program, she wants to maintain that.

She was also quoting the Drummond commission report and talking about how we should be implementing the Drummond commission report, but in the same—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Our side of the House is a bit confused about what he's debating, full-day kindergarten—the reality is, we're actually talking for the auditor to come in, and as he well knows, I can't, as a private member, call the auditor up and tell him to look at a certain area of the broader public service, but—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Ottawa Centre.

1450

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, thank you for eating up my time here. I was respectful when she was giving her advice.

I think it's really important, as to how we can use \$345 million, what kind of benefit it can have in our health care system, what kind of benefit that money, in these tough economic times, these tough fiscal times, can have in our rural communities. If you look at what \$345 million could pay for, it could pay for over two million house calls from doctors in our communities, both rural and urban. It can pay for over 27,800 hip or knee replacement surgeries, Speaker. It can pay for 17,400 bariatric surgeries and follow-up. It can pay for over nine million hours of home care for our seniors.

What can the same amount of money do in our rural communities? Well, Speaker, first of all, we spend more on horse racing than OMAFRA spends in direct farm support. In the 2011 program year, it was about \$319 million. That \$345 million is 18 times what we spend in a year on meat inspection. That's three and a half times what we have spent since 2003 on promoting local food, which directly helps farmers in our local rural communities. That's two times what we have spent since 2003 on

rural economic development projects, which have created or retained 35,000 jobs.

The point is that we need to continue to be responsible, balanced and fair in the manner in which we spend our dollars in these tough economic times. I think members from all ridings, from all communities, understand that point. Our focus at this moment has to be to invest every single resource we have in our health care so that our seniors and our children can get the best health care possible, and also to ensure that we are investing in education—in our schools, our colleges and our universities—so that our children can get the best education as we build our future economy. That's what we need to focus on.

That's what the OLG modernization is all about as well. It's to see how we can increase the revenues we can get from the OLG that get invested in health care and education, so that we have more monies available to us that we can spend in our communities.

I only ask members opposite to engage in making a fair argument—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Chatham—Kent—Essex, come to order, please.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: You cannot stand here on one day to argue that we should get rid of full-day kindergarten, that we should disadvantage our four- and five-year-old kids coming from both rural and urban communities to save money so that we lay off thousands of teachers and support workers and early childhood educators, but on the other hand, we should continue to spend \$345 million in the horse racing industry. I don't think the argument bodes well, especially on the same day. So I urge all members that we should work together so we can continue to invest money in health care and education. That should be our number one priority, because that's what Ontarians want.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We started out very nicely. I think we're getting a little bit out of control.

I would urge the member who was encouraging the audience to refrain from doing so. Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I know that if the member for Essex had had a little more time, he would have wanted to explain to the House, as well as to the visitors here, why he abstained from the budget vote in the spring, why he sat on his hands when he had the opportunity to defeat the government.

Mr. Speaker, let's recall what happened on March 12—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. My friend from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, if you're going to heckle, I would ask you to sit in your own seat.

I think all the other speakers received the blessing of everyone in the room to be allowed to speak without

interference, and I would expect it to continue for the rest of the afternoon.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Speaker, let's recall what happened on March 12. Without warning, without consultation and, we now know, without a proper economic impact study, the Minister of Finance announced that he would be scrapping the slots-at-racetracks program effective March 31, 2013. It is estimated that today the equine industry supports the employment of as many as 60,000 Ontarians, and I've been told that the equine industry employs thousands of people in my riding. From the beginning, we've said that unless the government changes course, the livelihood of many of our neighbours would be in jeopardy.

We know that many in the industry do not have easily transferable job skills. While the government has characterized the slots-at-racetracks program as a subsidy to the industry, our PC caucus has expressed the view that the program is in fact a revenue-sharing agreement. It has worked well for years, generating billions for the treasury over those years. We contended that the government had made a huge mistake by throwing the slots-at-racetracks program out the window.

While I firmly believe that the government must take immediate steps to get its spending under control and balance the budget, I have never accepted that this should include eliminating the horse racing industry in the province of Ontario. I publicly called upon the government to release any economic impact studies that they had done before making the decision to end the slots-at-racetracks program and kill the horse racing industry in Ontario.

A constituent from our area was thinking the very same thing. He went so far as to make a freedom-of-information request, asking for any economic impact studies that have been done. They responded to him with an economic impact note on Ontario's horse racing industry, which was generated by ministry staff as confidential advice to cabinet. The constituent gave it to me. Two weeks ago, my colleague the member for Perth-Wellington and I released it to the public.

The report is dated March 14. As we all know, the government announced its decision to end the slots-at-racetracks program two days before that. I submit to this House that this is proof positive that the government had made up its mind to kill the horse racing industry in Ontario before it had any idea of the true economic impact the industry represents, the real number of jobs the industry sustains and the reality faced by families whose livelihoods are dependent on a thriving horse racing industry.

Now let's take a look at the interim report of the horse racing industry transition panel. The Minister of Agriculture and Food was very selective in his public comments when he released the report, leading the media to believe that the panel agreed with the government's decision to scrap the slots-at-racetracks program. But people need to read the whole report, not just the executive summary, which is similarly one-sided. Quote, page 27, panel finding: "Without slots revenue or a new

revenue stream, the horse racing industry in Ontario will cease to exist." Quote, page 28, panel finding: "Absent some other new revenue stream, no Ontario racetrack has a viable business plan to continue racing operations after March 31, 2013." Quote, page 29, panel finding: "The essential ingredients for a viable horse racing industry—tracks, race dates and purses, and products—will dissolve once" the slots-at-racetracks program ends. Quote, page 31, panel finding: "If the industry closes, the panel has received expert advice that provision should be made for the humane dispatch and disposal of 7,500 to 13,000 horses in early 2013." Quote, page 32, panel finding: "We urge the government to make a decision quickly."

The importance of that final statement cannot be overestimated. We know that the autumn yearling sales in Ontario will commence within a matter of days. Without some certainty as to what the government is going to do or when, either the yearlings will have no buyers or their value will likely collapse. These young horses may then end up euthanized or purchased and sent to slaughter plants.

If there are no yearlings, the whole production cycle of the industry may suffer irreparable damage and horse racing will be finished in Ontario. But by supporting this motion today, the House can send a powerful message to the government that they must act now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: This boils down to one thing here. The government was looking for money because they got us into a \$16-billion deficit. And who did they go after? The hard-working people of the horse industry. They went after them because they couldn't find money anywhere else, because they spent it all. That's the problem.

When they say the word that they talk about, that they give them a "subsidy"—no. It wasn't a subsidy; it was a signed contract that the horse racing industry, the racetrack itself and the community signed with the government. You tell me, in any other part of this government, where you can get a 75% return on your money. Nowhere. If that was a bank, I'd be signing up tomorrow.

This industry brings in \$1.2 billion of revenue in this business. Yes, it's down a little bit because of the recession. Yes, some of the American bettors aren't coming over.

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But this industry would bounce back, and bounce back hard, when times get good, when people are working again, when there are jobs in this province. A lot of them will go to the track and to these situations.

What are you doing? You're cutting your legs off at the knees. And where are you going to get revenue like that somewhere else? You tell me one place. It won't be from the banks and insurance companies; it's not going to happen.

So I'm telling you right now that this is going to come back and bite you big-time, when all these people are out of work and the welfare costs go up and the social services costs go up and our health costs go up. I'll tell

you right now: You're going to hear about this in the next election for sure from the people of Ontario and the horse racing industry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the motion by the member from Nepean-Carleton. We don't agree on a whole lot of things, but one thing we do have in common is that my maiden name is MacNaughton. I too have the Scottish aversion to gambling. I find slots depressing. But I do find that my local racetrack, the Grand River, which I share with Ted, is a wonderful racetrack. It's a great way to spend an evening—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask, if you're referring to other members in the chamber, that you refer to them by their riding name rather than individual name.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I think I did say. It was me I referred to.

Mr. Rob Leone: You said "Ted." Wellington-Halton Hills.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: That Ted.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Oh, sorry. That Ted; okay.

It's a great way to spend an evening. Grand River is a wonderful track. It's operated by the agricultural society. It has a great relationship with the horse people, and it reinvests a lot of the money into improving the facility. I truly do want to see that racing community that is centred around Grand River to continue.

I want to comment on a couple of things in this motion. First of all, the business of a municipal referendum: Let me simply say that there is a requirement that if a municipality is going to be a host to a new casino or new slots, there must be municipal approval for that. The municipality already can have a referendum if it wants to, but if it wants to consult with the people by having public meetings, if it wants to hold delegations at council, if it wants to do a survey—paper or electronic—it can decide how it wants to do public consultation. That's the municipality's job, not ours.

Let's talk about horse racing, because there obviously is a problem here. The other Ted, the Minister of Agriculture and Food, actually did set up a transition panel, as I'm sure everyone here knows. The transition panel represented three former ministers—John Wilkinson from our side, who was a former Minister of Revenue and knows a lot about money; Elmer Buchanan from the NDP, who knows a lot about agriculture because he was a former Minister of Agriculture; and John Snobelen. I don't agree with much that Mr. Snobelen did on education, but I would be the first to admit that he's an excellent equestrian, and when it comes to the horse industry he probably knows more than his remaining colleagues combined. So with respect to horses, I respect John.

What did they have to say? I think it's really important that we have a look at what they actually had to say. Their mandate was to look at how to move forward.

When they looked at how to move forward, they actually commented that they had so many comments from people who just said, "The way to move forward is to keep everything the way it is, to return the slots-at-racetracks program." So I think it is useful to look at what they said. They talked about SARP, the slots-at-racetracks program, and said that if, at the outset, SARP had referred to objectives—it did refer to objectives such as the enhancement of live racing and sustaining the agricultural sector—clear benchmarks were not established to monitor the achievement of these goals. The government simply paid over the funds to the industry without guidelines or requirements, feeding a culture of entitlement. In fact, if the folks opposite had set the thing up properly in the first place, with the proper accountability and with the proper benchmarks, I'm quite sure we wouldn't be having this conversation today.

The panel goes on to talk about the fact that the panel's view is that the slot money is public money belonging to the people of Ontario and the government can redirect it to other purposes if it concludes it's in the public interest.

They go on to say that they often heard of SARP referred to not as a subsidy but as a partnership. They ask the question—if it's a partnership, it's a very one-sided one—it may work great for the industry, but what's in it for the public?

They then go on to analyze the industry and conclude that reinstating the slots program is not the thing to do. They do also say there needs to be a new source of revenue, that it needs to be greater than the \$50 million budgeted and what we need to do is have a conversation about—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to welcome residents from my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and the neighbouring riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell today, who are here, along with everybody, to support this important industry.

I stand today to commend my colleague from Nepean-Carleton, who has put politics aside to endorse this Liberal government's now famous and forgotten Don Drummond report and its recommendation to review the existing horse racing and breeding agreements. I will quote recommendation 17-4: "Re-evaluate, on a value-for-money basis, the practice of providing a portion of net slot revenues to the horse racing and breeding industry and municipalities in order to substantially reduce and better target that support."

I hear the words "re-evaluate," "net slot revenues," "industry" and "municipalities." I did not hear the word "cancel." This is just another example of this government wasting millions of dollars on projects and reports that may sound good and are intended to make them appear as if they are truly looking for ways to fix their spending problems. But sadly, it's just further proof that they are ignoring all reality, all advice.

I wonder if this document that talks about tough decisions to fix our province's spending problems is just now an embarrassment to them as they show they don't have the leadership or the backbone to listen to the advice and the warnings this document is clearly telling them, that action is required now to get our deficit problem under control and to make Ontario a leader in Confederation again. An Auditor General's report would provide an independent review of this very beneficial program and allow this government to save face and back away from a bad and losing proposition.

Today I heard some shocking information that speaks of how this government conducts business. The Minister of Agriculture had not even heard of the cancellation of the agreement until the budget was read. Can you believe this? This makes one question just how this government works. Its decision was made without the input of the ministry it so affects and without the benefit of a cost-benefit analysis that, as flawed as it was, was only completed two days after the budget was read.

Even a quick review shows an industry that contributes over \$1 billion to the province's coffers, employs an estimated 60,000 jobs in our rural communities and provides over \$50 million to the municipalities they reside in. This does not include the economic spinoff that's estimated to exceed \$1.5 billion.

I say to this government that it's time to wake up and start to run the province as the people of Ontario expect and demand. At a time when this government so desperately needs to increase its revenue and control our ballooning deficit, we see it killing one of its major revenue sources, money that we all need to pay for health care and education—all this in favour of an ill-fated program to force casinos into a lot of communities without the approval of the residents. Speaker, this is not only wrong. I commend my colleague from Nepean—Carleton for her efforts to wake up this McGuinty government to the harsh economic realities of the real world and to make them think about the 60,000 jobs of the horse racing and breeding industry, the families they support, and the people of Ontario who benefit from the \$1.1 billion in revenue it contributes. An immediate, overnight 10% increase in unemployment: Just like most of this government's programs, it just doesn't make sense.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We're here today because the Liberal government has decided to renege on a signed agreement with the racetracks in Ontario, including Sudbury Downs in my riding of Nickel Belt.

When it was first announced, the people affected asked to come and meet with me. They were not what the Liberals want us to believe: rich horse owners. Not at all, Mr. Speaker. They were young families. There were strollers and young kids around. Families, men and women, came and met with me, and those young families told me their stories. They came to northern Ontario and settled in Nickel Belt because they knew that if they

worked long hours, if they worked seven days a week, if they worked really hard, they could earn a living. They could earn a living and feel secure enough to get married, to have children, to buy a house, have a mortgage, make car payments, because they knew if they worked hard in this industry, they would do okay. But now all of this is at risk. Those young families are being told that their livelihood is being taken away to make room for 29 new casinos.

Since that first meeting, Mr. Speaker, I've learned an awful lot about this industry. I now know, thanks to FedNor, that did an economic analysis of the industry for my riding, that horse racing is a job producer in northeastern Ontario. It is actually one of the economic drivers.

Now that more and more economic information is coming out, it's clear that this is not an economic decision; it is a political one. It is not based on good finances. I urge the Liberals to rethink this wrong-headed decision before literally betting the farm on new casinos in urban areas.

Please look at everybody in here today. Please look at the 60,000 people in Ontario who will be affected. Please look at the 600 people in my riding who depend on that industry to earn a living. Doing otherwise is a shame.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate. The member for Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to have a few moments to speak to this fantastic resolution of my colleague the member for Nepean—Carleton, Lisa MacLeod. I think it's very important that we're having the debate here. I can't understand why anyone in the Legislative Assembly this afternoon wouldn't want to pass a motion like this, because it does a number of things. One, it gets down to the facts and dealing with the Auditor General on this particular program. My colleagues in our caucus know that sometimes the government opposite doesn't necessarily want to get to those facts. We've seen it time and time again as we move towards a \$30-billion deficit.

But the resolution, other than asking the Auditor General to take a look at this program, does something that I think is very important, and that's the issue of making it mandatory for a municipality to have a referendum if a new casino is moving forward. That's very important. Certainly the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex's bill that is on the books will do that. In my riding, we're in very close proximity to Rideau Carleton. I estimate there are over 1,000 jobs in the industry that feed the industry at that track and at tracks all across Ontario. But it also affects the casino that's presently in my riding in Gananoque, the casino at Thousand Islands. What's happening is that that community has had that facility for 10 years. Both the town and the township had a referendum that showed they wanted the casino, and the community has embraced it. They had a rally of over 400 people, showing that they were firmly in support of that facility.

Now, I know that some folks down the road in Kingston, maybe a few folks, are interested in maybe having

that casino move. I'm sure in my heart of hearts that the member for Kingston and the Islands would want his community to have a referendum, just like my communities had when they asked for that. He wants people to have a say. But by the public meetings, I'm not particularly sure that that's where they're going to be at.

Just in closing, the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex visited the Mark Steacy Stables in my riding. They gave us this book, with letters from every employee, all of their suppliers, showing that they wanted us to protect the horse racing industry—not just in the village of Lansdowne but all over the province.

I urge all of my colleagues to vote in favour of this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: The government is willing to gamble against the odds. If you look at what is happening around the world and happening in Canada as well, casinos are starting to lose money. They are not money-makers. The only money-makers are the people in this room. The horse tracks in this province continue to show in the black.

You are giving up a dream and following the wrong direction. If you were a gambler, I would tell you that the odds are against you. It's not that you're going to go anywhere with this. It's not that there's more money for schools, as one of your colleagues said. There is going to be less money, because they will not be working, they will not be contributing, and that billion dollars will be gone.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nepean—Carleton, you have two minutes for a reply.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. This was a lively and important debate for the people of Ontario, and I'd like to make a few thank-yous to the people who actually participated in this debate: my colleagues from Essex, Ottawa Centre, Wellington—Halton Hills and Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. The colleague from Guelph: I'm happy to say there's a busload from her riding today, and the next PC candidate, Anthony MacDonald, is here today. To my colleague and neighbour from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, thank you. To my colleague from Nickel Belt, my very good friend from next door to me as well from Leeds—Grenville and Beaches—East York, we've proven today we can have a serious debate on the future of gaming in this province, and we should.

We know that the casinos in Ontario, run by the OLG, lost \$46 billion in 2009. We know that they've had a difficult track record with their spending, and we know that the numbers put forward by the government are being challenged by an industry in our agricultural communities right across this province. I'm proud to stand with the NDP and Progressive Conservative caucus in supporting these people in the gallery, supporting those 60,000 jobs and ensuring that that \$1.2 billion that they contribute to our economy continues to contribute to our economy.

I still think the best way for us to proceed with this radical shift in gaming is to have all the facts and make informed choices. The best way to do that is to ask this assembly to direct the Auditor General to review those numbers, to see what it means for mental health and addiction, see what it means to our agricultural communities, see what it means to our policing sector in those urban communities. Then, as an assembly, together, 107 members here can make informed decisions, and our communities can make even more informed decisions when it goes to a referendum in their community.

I stand by the people who stand by me, and I want to thank the people in the gallery today for being here with us. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Mr. Rob Leone: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm informed, Mr. Speaker, that a number of people from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell would like to meet their member of Parliament to talk about the horse racing industry and—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker, if I may.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I just would like to inform the member that that's not a point of order at this time.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker: One thing I did neglect to say, and I did write it down. All members of the assembly are invited to a reception being hosted by me immediately after this debate to meet with the horsemen and horsewomen who have come here from their own communities and from across Ontario. It's in the Ontario PC caucus room, and you are all invited. Thank you.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I allowed it, but my good friend knows that that's not a point of order either.

Mr. Bill Walker: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce Gord Dougan, Randy Rier, Henry Martin and Ted Clarke, from the great riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, and supporters of the Hanover racetrack.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All members know that those are not points of order. I'd like to carry on with private members' bills.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (BLOCKER PADS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (BLOQUEURS)

Mr. Jackson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 102, An Act to amend the Education Act to restrict the use of blocker pads / Projet de loi 102, Loi

modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation pour restreindre l'utilisation de bloqueurs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you, Speaker. It's good to see I'm so popular with the gallery.

First of all, I'd like to thank everyone for being here today, joining in the debate for the second reading of Bill 102, an amendment to the Education Act for blocker pads.

I just want to start by saying that this issue is not a partisan issue. I know that we all care about kids, especially our most vulnerable kids in our schools. Today, I'm reaching out to you to ask you to simply do the right thing.

A few months ago, my colleague from Dufferin-Caledon brought something very disturbing to my attention. It was an article that appeared on a CTV News website. This article showed images of a few children with autism walking down a busy street in Barrie, surrounded by education assistants carrying large foam red blocker pads, like the type you would see on a football field or a rugby field. A parent of one of the children was at first shocked when she saw it and then was blind with rage. She had no idea her son was being treated in this manner. She was never informed of the practice, and she never gave permission for the use of such practices.

After the story broke, a flood of calls came to my office in Barrie, and that's when I began to further look into the issue and ultimately decided to advocate for the removal of blocker pads in schools for any other use than sport. I'm also personally affected by this issue in a small way. I have friends who live with autism. My son, who is eight years old—his best friend is a child with autism. I volunteered for people with autism from a very young age.

I'd like to emphasize that this matter is not a Barrie-centric anomaly. My colleagues in the Simcoe region, the members from Simcoe-Grey and York-Simcoe, have also mentioned that they've had community reaching out to them in response to the pre-emptive use of blockers in schools.

The well-being of our students concerns every Ontarian and future generations that will enter our school system. Throughout the process of developing this private member's bill, my colleagues have been overwhelmingly supportive and compassionate about this issue. We are here today because ensuring dignity for every Ontario student matters.

Parents have been telling me that they're utterly shocked to discover the practice in their children's schools. One parent of a child with special needs just today said that if force or other physical interventions were generally used by parents in the same manner in response to children acting out, the children would be removed from their home for their own safety. The bottom line is that many parents, including myself, are deeply concerned by this policy. I have two small

children myself. I cannot imagine anyone alienating them for being different, treating them like they're a danger to society and undermining their well-being in general.

To add insult to injury, parents were never consulted, informed by the schools, nor was this practice detailed in the children's safety plans. The Simcoe board's own special education advisory committee, otherwise known as SEAC, was not consulted on this practice either. When the decision to reintroduce blocker pads in Simcoe schools—and I stress "reintroduce"—was made, it was not accompanied by any regulatory guidelines or special training. In the end, SEAC wrote a letter to the board with their position and introduced a motion that reads: SEAC recommends "that the board cease use of all blocker shields with students as they negatively impact on the dignity and human rights of the students and create a negative social message which promotes fear and exclusion."

They went on to discuss a list of concerns with the practice, including: lack of consultation; blockers are not in safety plans, nor have they been prescribed by medical practitioners; the practice doesn't align with legislated social inclusion for persons with disabilities, Ontario regulation 299/10; and the message sent to the public is negative and discriminatory against students living with disabilities. This is from the board's own SEAC.

Since this, advocates of all kinds—human rights, special needs and self-advocates—many of whom sit in this gallery today, have been coming forward alongside practitioners and countless stakeholders to speak out against the pre-emptive use of blockers in classrooms. The Geneva Centre for Autism; Simcoe Community Services; Catulpa Community Support Services; Community Living Ontario; Integration Action for Inclusion; Canadian National Autism Foundation; James Lockyer, who sits in the gallery—or was here a moment ago—one of Canada's most famous lawyers for human rights who also advocates for the banning of blocker pads in schools and just about anywhere, as well as countless others have written letters to express that the systematic use of blocker pads is not only dangerous but demeaning to our students.

Despite the absence of community consultation to justify the implementation of a blocker pad policy in the first place, the community has sure come out of the woodwork to guarantee that their voice is heard. The Simcoe County Board of Education is the only board in Ontario, or even in Canada, that I have been able to find that systematically uses blocker pads pre-emptively against children, like they're just waiting for something to happen.

The news of this usage has spread throughout the province, but it has also spread throughout the United States and in Europe; it's actually making the news in Europe. It's something that's happening in my city that I'm ashamed of.

These pads degrade human dignity. Imagine seeing your children being marched down the street in full public view, escorted by people carrying blocker shields

for the first time. Imagine seeing that for the first time. If that's not bad enough, imagine actually being that child. How do you feel? Don't tell me they don't know the way they're being treated.

Are there really any positive outcomes to come out of this? No, clearly not. Are children benefiting from this? Clearly not. The only thing these pads are actually accomplishing is the undoing of community integration, the labelling and public humiliation of the most vulnerable students in our society, and the creation of a culture of fear in the classroom. I was honestly surprised at the reaction of our local board. It was one of sheer indifference, citing worker safety. In this case, it's a total cop-out, plain and simple. You don't just blindly implement a measure without considering the greater picture. Don't take it from me; the Geneva Centre for Autism maintains that policies must preserve the dignity of each individual when balancing health and safety concerns.

You can't just wholesale decide to implement a policy at the drop of a hat. The reason we have a process and consultations is to insulate decision-makers from unintended adverse effects. We are here today to address these adverse effects on our most vulnerable students and ensure that another board doesn't stray down the same unfortunate path in the future.

In any case, I'd like to discuss our priorities and worker safety in the education system for one moment, because I know that's of concern to some members. First of all, let me be clear: Kids come first, especially the ones who are most vulnerable in our society. Many years ago, children with autism were institutionalized and segregated from the rest of our community. All this did was humiliate them and make them dependent on the government and the institutions in which they lived. As a result, our society has progressed and matured. These institutions were closed, and efforts were made to integrate people with special needs into our communities. We do this by preparing them for the workplace and teaching the skills they need to take care of themselves and be productive, caring members of our community.

Second, there is no trade-off between worker safety and the dignity of students. Blocker pads are not essential for classroom safety—not for the workers and not for the students. There's no place for them. Most school boards in this province choose to implement alternative strategies instead of systematically using blocker pads. Similarly, education ministries in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba either do not support the use of blocker pads or, to their knowledge, blocker shields are not in use at all. Though working with children with special needs may represent a unique set of circumstances, proper training can almost always mitigate the use of blocker pads.

I had the pleasure of visiting the George Bailey school, run by Kerry's Place. This school helps prepare students with some of the most extreme cases of autism right across the spectrum in our real world. They do this without the use of any personal protective devices or restraints. Not only do they not use them, but when I

asked them if they did, they looked at me in a surprised way and stated that that was a 1960s solution. The message I received was clear: There was no place for blocker pads or restraints in the treatment of children with special needs, period. There are well-proven, effective ways to deal with these children with special needs, including non-violent crisis intervention programs. Professionals trained in this type of program regard the use of blocker pads in their escalation continuum as an extreme last resort.

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I asked a professional that I spoke with if, in his 25 years working with children with special needs, and autism specifically, he had ever used blocker pads or personal protective equipment or restraints. Without hesitation, his answer was no. Another professional explained why using blocker pads as a first response, as a band-aid solution to behaviour problems, was so ineffective it was even damaging in its practice. She spoke about a high school student with autism whose family recently came to Canada. The child consistently acted out and eventually was sent to a doctor, who discovered his teeth were rotting out of his mouth from poor health care when he was younger. For a non-verbal child, acting out is sometimes the only way they can communicate that something is wrong—in this case, intense pain. Blocker pads may inadvertently take away that voice of a non-verbal child who is doing his or her best to communicate complex emotional messages. Essentially, this professional was most concerned that this policy encourages education assistants to use blocker pads as a management system for youth instead of focusing on the root cause of the problem behaviours themselves.

Another story I just want to tell you before I conclude is about a tour I got of the George Bailey school by one of the students. A student took me through the school and introduced me to the different rooms and the different facilities within the school. He introduced me to teachers who were working with other students in the school and even gave me a short little lesson on Russian history, which would put my professor friend from Cambridge to shame, I think. We came to one room and he made a special note and said, "You know, one year ago I destroyed this room," because he got so agitated and so violent. He was telling me that he was throwing computers and made a mess of things. But one year later, he's giving tours of the school, introducing me to teachers, talking about why he changed—because people actually cared about modifying his behaviour and taught him how to communicate, how to deal and not act out. I asked him, "Are you happy? Are you happier?" He looked at me and almost started crying, and said, "I couldn't be better. I can't imagine being in that place that I was in less than one year ago."

Promoting the dignity of all students with an inclusive learning environment must be a classroom priority. Most other jurisdictions nationwide have found alternative strategies to manage children with special needs, meanwhile ensuring worker safety at the same time. It is time

for Ontario to follow suit and stand up for the well-being, dignity and human rights of our most vulnerable in society. I implore you to do the right thing: Support this bill for the kids who are affected by this policy as we debate it here this afternoon and for the future generations that pass through the education system. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I am so pleased to have the opportunity to speak to amending the Education Act with respect to the use of blocker pads. I want to thank the member from Barrie for bringing it forward because, for me, it raises very important issues that need to be addressed. If this bill moves to the committee stage, I also look forward to MPPs considering the issue in more detail. We need to have a meaningful discussion so that we may do what I think we are all striving for with this bill. It's meeting educational and developmental needs of some of our most vulnerable students, and meeting those needs in a way that respects the dignity of our students and their families and recognizes the difficult job done by educational workers.

Disability rights are not always at the forefront of people's minds, and that's not a good endorsement of our society, but it's a reality of the world that we live in. One should be determined to change it. Thankfully, there are some who show that determination and hold society to account for its failings. It is so important that they do so. So I want to take a moment and thank those who work so hard on disability issues through their advocacy, raising awareness and their demands for change. Oftentimes, we do not recognize a disability or the full extent of challenges that come with it, and we do not recognize the importance of support for families and the necessity that that support exist within our communities. We did not fully recognize the importance of government support either, that for so many families affected by autism, rash or unadvisable policy decisions at the government level can have a profound impact on their day-to-day lives.

As an MPP and the NDP critic for children and youth services, I take my role very seriously. I understand that I am here at Queen's Park to be a voice for children, adults and families impacted by autism as well as other challenges faced by so many of our young people. So when families come forward with a problem like this one, it is my job to listen and to take action.

Make no mistake; these are no small challenges for families with children with autism—and adults as well. I have spoken before in this House of the stress that many families are under as they care for their loved ones: the sleepless nights, the constant reassurances to calm their child each time they enter a social situation which they perceive to be a new one, the fight for services they so badly need, and the steady insistence as they strive for the acceptance of others and the rights of their child.

The determination and diligence of disability rights activists, those who live with disabilities and their families and friends, help us all to overcome our prejudices and, yes, our ignorance. These advocates, parents and

researchers, and many others, play an essential role in helping us understand the issues but also the invaluable contributions that children and adults who live with autism can make in our society. Let us not forget that important point: that, with the right supports for these children, they can do amazing things. I greatly appreciate the important work these families and advocates do, identifying and facing the challenges before us as we consider ourselves truly equal in society, where all persons can live to their fullest, whether they have autism or whether they have any other kind of challenge.

We have heard from many of these activists with respect to the use of blocker pads in schools, and they have raised legitimate concerns: that the blocker pads are damaging to the dignity of the students, that they are dehumanizing. The point has been made that as we struggle to break down barriers, the images of the pads can suggest instead that we're putting up barriers. Social inclusion is a concept that I've always valued for a better, more just society. We must appreciate, understand and accept our differences. In our schools, we must be careful that we do not send a message that any group of students should be feared or avoided; otherwise, our goal of inclusion will never be realized. That, I believe, is the basis of the concerns that saw this bill being brought forward, and I share those concerns.

But this bill raises a much more complex issue that I believe will not be adequately addressed by the present wording of the bill. That issue is, how can we best meet the needs of the students with special needs?

Mr. Speaker, school boards are chronically underfunded, and that is particularly true in the area of special education. One result of that underfunding is that we do not have enough educational assistants to meet the demands and the needs that are put upon them, and students are paying the price. Children with autism benefit greatly from familiarity with those who work with them. When I met with representatives of Autism Ontario, they expressed to me that one of the greatest needs in the treatment and care of children with autism is that education assistants stay in their positions longer so that this familiarity can develop. The developmental educational needs of children with autism are best met when they are most at ease, in a predictable environment with familiar people, following a regular routine. These would be key elements to a successful program in our schools, and they aren't difficult concepts to understand, but the underfunding of special education makes them extremely difficult to attain.

1540

Educational assistants are dedicated workers, devoted to the students that they work with. They do an exceptionally difficult job in very trying circumstances. When speaking with educational assistants, it's clear to see that they care deeply for their students—and they couldn't do the job if it were otherwise. They appreciate more than most that they're working with an exceptional group of students requiring a greater level of understanding. But they also have legitimate concerns for their own safety,

and those concerns are based on their own experiences, not what might happen. The reality is this: Unfortunately, violent episodes do happen, and they happen often. In the southwest region of the Toronto District School Board alone in the last year there were 498 violent incidents reported, and sometimes these violent episodes are at the hands of students significantly larger and stronger than the worker. We need to take a much closer look at the full problem before us. We should not be satisfied by a simple ban. We need as well broader solutions that work with the children with autism, their families and the educational assistants. We need to understand what we can do to reduce the violence in the first place.

There are factors related to understaffing that increase the agitation within these students. I understand that in some areas the ratio of workers to students used to be two full-time educational assistants per teacher dealing with eight students. That ratio is now 1.5 EAs per teacher dealing with anywhere from six to 12 students. When the workload has increased, is there a greater chance of disruption, causing others to happen? I think we can all appreciate that in the circumstances the ability to calmly defuse a situation is seriously curtailed.

How can we expect to meet the needs of children with autism in our school system if we do not respect the challenges and concerns of the people who work with them? Yes, we must provide the best care and treatment possible, and we need to ensure that we treat everyone with the respect and dignity that we would expect ourselves, but to do that we need to respect those into whose care we put our students with special needs. We need to value the work that they do because it can be invaluable. We need to provide the support and resources they need, allowing them to feel a greater sense of fulfilment to remain in their jobs, building and maintaining the familiarity that is so important. We need to pay them a decent wage that reflects the demands of the difficult job that they do. The alternative is a never-ending cycle of new faces on the job, which is a drastic step in the wrong direction and serves nobody's best interests.

These are some of the things we should be considering in this bill, as well as the banning of blocker pads, because it seems to me that the blocker pads are a symptom of a much larger problem.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will support this bill at second reading. It needs to go to committee to be amended with some more solutions to a very complex issue. This bill provides a wonderful opportunity to have a discussion that is very long overdue, a meaningful discussion that invites input from families, from experts in the field, from education workers and from school boards. We need voices and minds to come together to try to find the best road forward, and we must take advantage of the opportunity we have before us. As I mentioned earlier, I believe everyone affected by the issue that this bill reflects has the same goal: to best meet the educational and developmental needs of the students. We have a better chance of achieving that goal by working together,

airing our views, considering differences and finding workable solutions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, I must, first of all, in my first opportunity to address a measure from the member from Barrie—it's a little bit belated, but I'd like to congratulate him on his election. I've had the opportunity to share the floor with him and to be with him at a few events. He's a good member. I welcome him to the assembly and I certainly thank him for bringing forth Bill 102, An Act to amend the Education Act to restrict the use of blocker pads.

We have in our discussion so far focused on one aspect of the issue, that being autism. It is worth noting that if you read both the explanatory note and the bill itself—and I pronounce no judgment on this, but the bill itself doesn't mention the word "autism." It does talk about the restriction of the use of blocker pads, but it does so in a very general sense, and I think it's in the sense that the bill proposes the restrictions on blocker pads that I think we should be discussing it and treating it in the House.

As my colleague from Hamilton Mountain said, perhaps it's a measure that does deserve further study, and I couldn't argue with that. I think that's a very good suggestion. I think it comes, really, to this: We're talking about an issue of safety. I think we can all agree, regardless of where we come from or what our take is on this, that we should be focused on the safety of our students while they're in school, and we should also be focused on the safety of our teachers and our support workers while they, too, are on the job. It also comes down to a part of there being a necessity to provide dignity in education.

I think that's really where the member is coming from here, that you're entitled to a measure of dignity while you're in the education system. I think we all agree that we have to take reasonable measures to ensure that, in a safe and dignified environment, both the student and the support worker or the teacher remain reasonably protected in the circumstances. Every student in Ontario deserves to learn in an environment where he or she feels safe.

But the other part that I also want to introduce here is that while the member is debating the measure in the Ontario Legislature—and perhaps it will be the will of the House to send it to committee to wonder if there are any other facets that the member may have wanted to expand upon at second reading that we can consider in committee and expand upon in third reading—in the end, much of this remains in the jurisdiction of school boards to set policies that ensure the safety of both their students and their staff. I know the member doesn't wish to override school boards in this respect, but perhaps—and again, I've read the act so I'm just trying to read in the member's intent—to provide some guidance to school boards so that the school boards' policies and guidelines can be clear, can be consistent, can be defensible and can provide exactly that environment of safety and dignity.

The other thing that I think we should give some consideration to—and again, having read the act, the act doesn't describe what scope the word "restrict" has. I know the member didn't intend to use the word "ban," but again, as we continue to consider the bill and its impact and its long-term effect, what do we mean by "restrict"? I put this forth as a constructive comment. I don't mean to use it as a means of criticizing the bill, but I would like to ask the member to think of the word "restrict" and what scope you intend on it, because when we bring it back, let's talk about the scope of it.

I understand that in his area, the Simcoe County District School Board in fact had a community discussion on it and talked about the use of foam blockers in schools.

Speaker, I know some of my colleagues have some thoughts on it, too, and I've spoken a few seconds longer than I intended, but I thank the member for bringing it forward, and I thank you for the opportunity to discuss it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Christine Elliott: It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 102, which would amend the Education Act to prevent the use of blocker pads to manage children and youth with special needs. I would like to commend my colleague the member from Barrie for bringing this forward and taking the initiative, because I think it deals with a very important issue in our society, which is the rights of people with special needs and the need to promote inclusion in our society.

I was, like most people, pretty shocked when I saw the images of students from the Simcoe county board being herded—and I use that term advisedly—along the street by staff using large rugby blocker pads. And I would say that there were pleas made by both the member from Barrie and by our colleague the member from Dufferin-Caledon to have this practice ended. This was directed to both the Minister of Education and the county school board, but despite that, there was not an end put to this appalling practice.

1550

There is no need to treat these students in such an inhumane and disrespectful manner. Concerns have been raised that the pads are necessary in order to protect staff from harm, and we certainly agree that we should do everything that we can to protect staff. But the fact remains that many individuals and organizations have come forward to say that there are other ways of dealing with this: more staff knowledge in training in the use of other measures to deal with students that might have behavioural issues, because there's no question this does happen from time to time. Some of these measures are far more efficacious and can also be used without violating students' human rights.

Some of the groups that have come forward have included Community Living Ontario and the Geneva Centre for Autism. I think we all agree that the Geneva Centre is one of the foremost experts on dealing with children and youth with autism spectrum difficulties.

Their position is that the dignity of each individual must be preserved when balancing health and safety concerns. Introduction of red blocker shields only serves to promote fear of students who are already at great risk of marginalization and social exclusion. The indiscriminate use of the red blocker shields as protective gear throughout the school day may in fact trigger more aggressive acts from students with autism spectrum disorder.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this really goes against everything that we have been pushing for in Ontario in the last number of years as we use the blueprint of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Many of you will be familiar with one of my own personal heroes, Mr. Jean Vanier, who, as we all know, is the founder of the L'Arche movement. L'Arche, as many people know, sees all people with disabilities and abilities as having equal value and encourages people to share life together. I'd just like to take a moment to quote from Mr. Vanier and what he says on this issue:

"Those who are weak have great difficulty finding their place in our society. The image of the ideal human as powerful and capable disenfranchises the old, the sick, the less able. For me, society must, by definition, be inclusive of the needs and gifts of all its members. How can we lay claim to making an open and friendly society where human rights are respected and fostered when, by the values we teach and foster, we systemically exclude segments of our population?"

I believe that those we most often exclude from the normal life of society—people with disabilities—have profound lessons to teach us. When we do add them, they add richly to our lives and add immensely to our world. I would agree, Mr. Speaker, that we have much to learn, and for this reason, I would urge all members of this House to support this bill this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm delighted to rise today and would like to commend the member from Barrie on Bill 102, An Act to amend the Education Act to restrict the use of blocker pads. I think his sincerity and his experience spoke for themselves. His conviction on this issue simply resonated through everything he said.

I would also like to say that the member from Hamilton Mountain did bring the issue of worker safety to the table, and I think this is why it's important that this issue be further considered in committee. I think we all believe that every student in Ontario does deserve to learn in an environment where they feel supported and respected. We know that it is, in fact, up to the local school boards to ensure that there are policies to ensure the safety of both their students and staff. However, the work refusal in the Simcoe county board shows that, perhaps, some of this just wasn't happening.

My experience of autism goes back to my medical school days, when autism was ascribed to the coldness of the mother, and there was a complete lack of realization that this, in fact, is a neurological disease. My insight came from serving on the board of Giant Steps Toron-

to—it's actually a school funded by the York region board of education—with a very high educational assistant-to-student ratio. The whole idea was integration into the classroom. That's where I learned so much about the issue of behaviour and potential ways of modifying behaviour very successfully, and the importance of training for those who were going to be working with these children, whether it be in the school setting or another setting, a camp setting. It's all an issue of a behaviour that may be frightening to those who are not properly trained in what autism—and other developmental disorders, actually—involve. There's a stigma issue here, too, and the more that we can do to ensure the appropriate training, the proper consultation and assessment plan for each individual student—so that worker, student, parent—everyone—is on the same page as to what the learning plan for this individual child is.

I'm happy to say that our government has made some major investments in terms of training. In fact, there is some \$57 million since 2006 through targeted funding that has been put to building capacity and improving the learning environment for students with autism and autism spectrum disorder, including some \$5 million to the Geneva Centre for Autism to train teachers' assistants and, perhaps in this case very importantly, \$1 million for the Geneva Centre for Autism to provide principal training. That seems to have been an issue in the case specifically in Simcoe county.

I commend the member for bringing this forward. I feel a full discussion at committee on this issue, the use of restraints in various situations, is entirely warranted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Tip O'Neill, the famous Democratic Senator and Speaker in the United States, once said, "All politics is local." I say that in reference to my colleague Rodney Jackson from Barrie. He has epitomized that all politics is local. The moment he found out about this blocker pad issue in his community, and his vast displeasure that it exists in Ontario, he took it to his colleagues. I was one of those colleagues. Not only did he bring the issue or the problem or the thing that he had great dissatisfaction with and something that's quite inhumane to his colleagues, he then provided a solution in this bill, showing that all politics is local and that one MPP can make a difference. That's why I'm proud to support him today as the Ontario PC education critic and speak on behalf of Tim Hudak and the rest of caucus in supporting this new, dynamic member who has gone above and beyond for kids in his community that are vulnerable.

He does so from time to time against the will of this government. From time to time, regardless of what the idea is on this side of the House, they find a way to—I don't know—let's just say "oppose it."

I think that is the problem because there has been a systematic use of blocker compromises in his community, in Barrie. It has compromised human rights and the dignity of our most vulnerable. In his opening speech,

he talked about a young fella that took him around and toured him through a community. He used that example, and it was particularly poignant—it was about the last minute of his speech—when he talked about this young fella having had outbursts. They weren't controlled because he was never taught how to deal with responses. A year later, he was able to take my colleague and another one of our colleagues on a tour and ask a lot of questions and be precocious and be a real school community leader.

That is in distinct opposition to what this government has allowed to occur. They have allowed to occur a culture of fear in the classroom with these blocker pads. It severely undermines the social inclusion of this vulnerable group of students.

1600

From time to time in this assembly, we talk about the issues that are most important to us or that are raised by our constituents, or about an injustice that we feel needs to be corrected in the assembly, because we were elected to bring that voice. That is what the member from Barrie has done. He believes, as do I and this caucus, that this bill is necessary.

The education minister has had her chance to stand up for these children. She has failed to do so. She could have issued a directive to stop this practice, but instead, she sloughed off the matter to the same local school board that allowed it to occur in the first place.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I am ashamed that the former Minister of Community and Social Services would be heckling this member and defending that practice, because it is disgusting. It is below us. It is beneath the dignity of this chamber.

He is bringing forward a social issue, and the reality is that it needs to be supported. Most jurisdictions across Ontario do not support this measure. He indicated that other jurisdictions across Canada refuse to allow this practice to occur.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If I hear one more time from this government, after a decade in office, that it's Mike Harris's fault, I think I'm going to throw up. I mean, come on. You are responsible for the social ills that affect our province today. That is your problem.

Due to the re-emergence of this practice, this bill is necessary. I'll be supporting my colleague. He has brought a serious initiative forward. He typifies that adage that Tip O'Neill brought to the United States government: "All politics is local." He is defending the people he represents. At the end of the day, this crowd is not going to support it. I can't understand that, Speaker. And to blame Mike Harris?

Interjection: Did they really?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They just blamed Mike Harris. How could you do that? That totally delegitimizes your debate. It delegitimizes your opinions. At the end of the day, private members' business is not about blaming each other; it's about getting progress. My colleague is trying

to bring progress to a situation in his community that he finds unjust, that affects children. It affects vulnerable children. He is here today to stand up for them, and we in the Ontario PC caucus support him. We'll continue to support him in the Ontario PC caucus.

We feel this bill is necessary because the Ontario Liberal government won't act. He will. The distinction is very clear. This problem has existed. He saw an issue. He's doing the right thing, which a member of provincial Parliament should do who represents their community. He brings it here, and I'm proud of him. There needs to be a bill. There needs to be a law. There's no trade-off between worker safety and the safety of the kids in our schools. That is what he is putting forward here. A child was accidentally smothered a decade ago with a blocker pad.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh, thank you very much, Speaker. I thought I had six minutes on the clock. My colleague would also like to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to begin my remarks on this particular bill this afternoon by recognizing the member from Barrie for bringing forward the proposed legislation.

Every student in Ontario deserves to learn in an environment where they feel supported, respected and safe. The proposed Bill 102 brings to light the use of physical restraints on special-needs students by some school boards. It is the responsibility of school boards to set policy that ensures the safety of the students and the staff. Every school board should make its decision in consultation with the community and seek input from the special education advisory committee, better known as SEAC.

I understand that the member from Barrie initiated the proposed Bill 102 because the staff at Simcoe County District School Board have been using foam blocks or blocker pads in some of the schools and the school board is seeking the best advice possible to ensure that the best decisions are made for the safety and well-being of the students and staff in the board.

The proposed Bill 102 reflects a similar approach to that we use in the health sector, implemented back in 2000. In 2001, the then Minister of Health and Long-Term Care passed the Patient Restraints Minimization Act. The act set out when to use restraints on patients, and emphasis is on the minimum use of restraints. Because of this act, the College of Nurses has developed practice standards requiring all registered staff—RNs, RPNs, nurse practitioners—to ensure the use of restraints to be the last resort.

Research has shown that the use of restraints such as blocker pads increases agitation and disruptive behaviours and does not reduce negative outcomes. I am particularly concerned about the use of any kind of physical restraints without the consent of the patient, in this case without the consent of the parents. And there must be

proper training of the teacher and the support staff and, furthermore, documentation of the use of the restraints—documentation is critical—and ongoing review of the restraints.

I also believe that the proposed legislation raises the awareness and education about this concern, and that's the right thing to do. And the fact is that the local school board can address this issue, because I know, as a former trustee for the Toronto District School Board, that we have taken the position not to use blocker pads and not to use this type of restraint to address students' concerns about safety. So by bringing forth this particular legislation to the House, we now know about these concerns.

If the will of the Legislature moves this forward, I think at the committee level, if it goes forward to that level, we need to look at how this issue comes forward, what we can do to ensure every student in our school, as well as the staff, is safe, but more importantly, look to the health sector to learn from them how to improve, because at the end of the day we're all talking about one thing: the safety of our students and the safety of our staff.

I certainly believe that there is momentum now when this issue is brought before the Legislature, and all of us have a duty to address this issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I want to thank the member from Barrie for bringing forward this Bill 102. What I will say is that it's unfortunate that we have to have a bill on it. In mid-April, five months ago, I wrote the minister on this issue, and I'll just read you a few excerpts:

"I was proud to support the move to finally close the last three institutions that once housed individuals with a developmental disability."

"I am proud to support the inclusion of students with special needs in our schools and workplaces."

"The practice that is happening at Barrie North Collegiate goes against every statement of inclusion and participation that politicians from all three political parties espouse. Why would students feel safe approaching a student with special needs in their classroom after seeing such appalling activity? Why would an employer hire a student with special needs after watching these students escorted in such a way?"

"When we made your office aware"—and this is a letter that I wrote to the minister five months ago—"of what is happening, your response was dismissive and, quite frankly, disappointing. To tell me that it is the decision of the school board is abdication of your responsibilities as the Minister of Education for all Ontario students. The reality is that the Minister of Education does have the ability to stop it. It's under the provincial policy program memorandum."

I wish he had done that and we wouldn't be here today talking about it, and the students in Barrie would have been protected.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member from Barrie, you've got two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the members from Hamilton Mountain, Mississauga–Streetsville, Whitby–Oshawa, Oak Ridges–Markham, Nepean–Carleton—with her usual zeal—Scarborough–Agincourt, and Dufferin–Caledon, of course.

There are a few things we know here. We know that with the proper training, workers can assist children with special needs the proper way, appropriately. It may be an issue of resources and resource allocation, but I'll tell you one thing: It's not a result of the hard-working education assistants who do work with these children. It's not their fault. They're doing the best they can to get through their day safely. They don't have the proper tools in their training or at their disposal to be able to get it done. They're using a last-resort solution.

1610

The last thing I'd like to leave you with is another little bit of a story I didn't get a chance to get to, but I think it illustrates in a fairly graphic way these blocker pads and the usage of them. Just the other day, my colleague from Perth–Wellington, when we were talking about this and he saw the pictures of it, said, "You know, I've seen these exact same pads used to herd and corral pigs at pig farms." That image alone is enough to revolt, I think, anybody into using this really acute bill that's dealing with an acute problem and get rid of it, get rid of it now. If it starts a larger conversation, as some of the members have suggested, that's great too. But the point is, we need to deal with this acute problem immediately. If it leads to another discussion that leads to more resources or different resources being allocated to help children who have special needs and children with autism in our schools and make sure that they function in our society in a meaningful and great way, as we know they can, then that mission is accomplished.

I thank all those who spoke for their support on this bill. I look forward to seeing it in committee and having a greater discussion about it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT
(ELECTION OF CHAIR
OF YORK REGION), 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS
(ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT
DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal with the first ballot item, number 49, standing in the name of Mr. Moridi. Mr. Moridi has moved second reading of Bill 60. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Richmond Hill.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Would the House refer this bill to the Standing Committee on General Government, please?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING
CORP.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod has moved private member's notice of motion number 25. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a motion, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): It's just a motion? Okay, thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But I will say this: Thanks to all members of the assembly for the very vigorous debate that we had. I appreciate that.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(BLOCKER PADS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ÉDUCATION (BLOQUEURS)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Jackson has moved second reading of Bill 102. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is referred to—Mr. Jackson?

Mr. Rod Jackson: I'd like to refer it to regulations and private bills, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT
LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 29, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order: Mr. Speaker, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but there were some noes on some of the previous votes. I would just ask that a

little bit more attention be given to the actual votes, because I heard definite noes on some of these votes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Unfortunately, I didn't hear it, and I didn't have anybody stand up in objection—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But, Speaker, you were doing something else, and I had to wait for you to finish that before I rose on the point of order. This is the first opportunity. I would just ask—maybe the table clerks can assist a bit. I don't know what to say, but I definitely heard noes on a couple of these votes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I hear what you're saying, but if somebody said no, it's really up to them to stand up and bring it to the attention of the Speaker. I did not hear it. It's done.

Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order: Speaker, a matter of important urgency. I ask that you bear with me. I have just had a notice that the Newmarket OSPCA has initiated euthanasia of its entire animal population because of a ringworm outbreak. We have been here before, Speaker. I am going to ask the minister to immediately look into this. We cannot have a repeat of what happened a year and a half ago.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would say to the member that that's not a point of order. You may want to speak to the minister privately.

The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to preface my remarks on Bill 115 today—I think I need to put this in context. I have always had the highest regard for people in the teaching profession. I know that many members have stood up and made that statement, but I just want to give a little bit of context around that. I have always thought that teachers and support workers give of themselves in such a tremendous way in order not only to help the societies in which they live, but generally to help those who are the most marginalized, whether that be through poverty, through racism, through lack of opportunity, or more recently in the Canadian context of those who are newcomers to Canada and who may not understand one of the official languages or may be unfamiliar with the cultures they find here. I have seen teachers alone, through their work, lift up the poor and the underprivileged and give them confidence and an opportunity to go forward. And I have seen them perform amazing feats in doing their job and in doing it right.

As I have said before in this House, and probably will say again, growing up in Regent Park, it is very easy to see what a difference good teachers and a good school system make to those who are the most marginalized and find themselves living in poverty.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: I know, but the Speaker seems oblivious at this point. Mr. Speaker, I can hardly hear myself. I don't know that you can hear me at all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): There are several side discussions going on in the chamber, and

the speaker is having trouble delivering his comments. I would ask everybody to quiet down.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a little quieter now.

Egerton Ryerson, all those many years ago here in the province of Ontario, when he set up the school system, set it up so that every child could be educated. He set it up so that the school system would work not only for those who were rich or who came from families which could afford a good education, but that every child could afford that education and every child would be given the opportunity, in those days up until their 14th or 16th birthday, to avail themselves of a public education, paid for with public dollars, taught by public teachers who worked for the state—not for churches, not for individuals, not for the rich. It is that public system that we have come to pride ourselves on in this province.

It was because of good teachers—teachers who cared, teachers who really saw some promise in a poor kid from Regent Park—that I was able to go on to university and ultimately end up making speeches in this House. I want to thank them. I want to thank them for what they did, for what they saw and for what they were able to do for countless others like me. I think we need to have that kind of context about the teachers, because I have heard some people speaking, over these last few days—not many, but a few—who would somehow put the teachers down, who would somehow put the unions to which they belong down, who would somehow say that what they are trying to do is greed or what they're looking for is things that they cannot have because the economy is not good. But I think if you put in context who and what they are and what they have been able to accomplish and all of those people in our society that they have helped in the past and even unto this day, you have to look at where we go from here with them in that vein.

It has been my opportunity over the last few months to travel and to meet people from other places. But I want to tell you of one experience that I had in Cleveland. We have a conference which many members of the Legislature attend. It takes place in several places, mostly in the United States, and it's the council of midwestern state and provincial governments. We also belong, of course, to the eastern conference of state and provincial governments, Ontario being the huge size that it is.

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I was at the midwestern conference in Cleveland and there was a considerable debate there about education in the United States. I stood up and I talked with pride about what was happening in Ontario, talking with pride about what is happening here, because the United States has seen themselves go from first place when it came to post-secondary education in the world to 16th place in one generation. They've gone from number 1 to number 16 out of the 21 OECD countries that are monitored. They have seen their test scores fall and they have seen all kinds of things happen as a result of successive governments that don't want to spend money on education and

who see this as a way of, I guess, saving taxpayers' funds.

I talked to them about the Ontario experience. I said some of the same things that the Minister of Health stood up and said yesterday. She stood up and said eight things that made the schools in Ontario the best in the world. She didn't get to the eighth, she only got seven out, but I don't have a huge disagreement with what she had to say. We have excellent schools, and they are excellent schools primarily because we have excellent teachers.

We have insisted over the years that teachers have not one but two university degrees. They all have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in either arts or science and they are all required to go for further education, to get a bachelor of education degree, before we allow them to teach. And we don't pay them a lot of money. For those who think that it's some kind of pampered job, they start around \$33,000 or \$34,000 at the bottom level. They have a grid system so that after 20 years, they get paid in the \$75,000 to \$80,000 range, and more if they have additional degrees or master's degrees or Ph.Ds. But we don't pay them a lot of money.

I want to say that the majority of teachers that I have known over my life—and I swear the majority of teachers that you have known over your life—are dedicated to the job. Many of them could make more money doing something else but they love teaching, they love the children and I think they love the results of their work, because they can influence people to be better than they would otherwise have been.

I wanted to put that in context because here we are debating a bill. We are debating a bill and I have heard the government members use three primary reasons why we're doing this. The first reason is that it is important to freeze their wages. I want to say that the teachers agree. The teachers agree, and do not, and are not, and have not since last April sought an increase in their wages. They are asking, to a person, that their wages be frozen. I don't know where the government rhetoric comes from on this, when members stand up and say, "We have to freeze their wages; otherwise we have to cut programs."

No teacher in Ontario is seeking an increase in their wages, and that has to be fundamentally made clear—not one of them. Not one union, not one teacher has stood there and demanded a wage increase. If you can show me on the government side a single individual—I have yet to read of it, I have yet to hear of it and I am unaware of it. So I would hope that the government members stop using that as an excuse. There is no money expected by the teachers' unions or the teachers themselves in this round of bargaining. In fact, as far back as April, when they tabled their bargaining demands, their bargaining demands included a two-year wage freeze—as far back as April. So there's the first one.

The second one is that they said that they needed to order them back to work, and I have heard this from government members: "We need to order these teachers back to work to make sure that they don't strike on September 1." Again, I have been monitoring this very

closely since last April, when the first bargaining proposals went forward, and I have yet to hear of a single board or teacher saying that they want to go out on strike. I know how nasty strikes can be in the public service. I was a public servant myself, and I witnessed first-hand how nasty those strikes were when the teachers were forced out in the 1995 to 2003 era. I remember walking the picket lines around East York Collegiate and some of the public schools with the teachers at that time. They felt they were vilified. They felt that their cause was just. They felt that they were doing it in order to protect the students, whom they cared most hugely about. I have yet to hear of a single teacher or a single board saying they wanted to strike. In fact, the unions have not even asked for a strike vote. They have not even asked that it be sent to an arbiter or to conciliation yet, at this point. They have not even gone through all of the things they have to do in order that a strike could legally occur. So I would hope the government would stop using the rhetoric that this is legislation to send them back to work. They intend to be at work and they will be at work, whether this bill passes or not, on September 4, because they believe that much in the children they are teaching and the families in Ontario for whom they work.

The last thing, which was very surprising to me, is that many members of the government have stood up and talked about how it is important to impose a contract across all of Ontario that is synonymous with that of OECTA, the Catholic teachers. You know, I've consulted and had a few small discussions with members who are trustees. There are 72 school boards across this province. They were caught flat-footed. They thought that was their job. They thought that's what they were supposed to do. They thought that they were going to negotiate with the teachers and come up with local solutions that fit local problems. In fact, the teachers were all well and determined to negotiate with the trustees and with the local boards, as the law requires. All of a sudden, we have this bill. What happened?

I think, sadly, we know what happened. We know that the government is intending to be tough. The government wants to flex its muscles against its former friends, the people that you love to call partners. I don't know how many times I heard, "These teachers are our partners." I will tell you, when I went out onto the lawn to talk to the teachers two days ago, they did not feel like partners. They felt like they were being treated almost like the enemy. If you want to treat people as partners, then you have to listen to them; you have to negotiate with them; you have to make them party to the final agreement, and you have not.

Now, it's very simple. I mean, one can look at statements in this House from various ministers and backbenchers in the Liberal government, and my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party who don't think it goes far enough but are going to vote for it anyway, and this is going to pass. At some time in the next few days, this is going to pass. And at some time in the next few days, something else is going to happen. The government

knows it; Conservatives know it; New Democrats know it; all the people who write in the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* and the *Sun*, all of the people who broadcast television know it. There's going to be a court challenge. We all know that. You know only too well that that is going to happen. In fact, because we live in a litigious society, I probably would not expect anything else. These are people whose fundamental rights are being taken away, have been abrogated by an act of this Legislature, I think without cause. I really don't know what that cause is, because nothing that the government says in defence of it is, in fact, correct. So we have a group like the Canadian Civil Liberties Association this morning weighing in, saying that this is an illegal thing that is happening. I have great respect for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association; I was a dues-paying member for many years. Although I don't pay anymore, I still admire what they do and I still admire the lawyers who work there and who advise us when Canadians' rights are taken away, because one of the things that makes me proudest to be a Canadian is that we have those civil liberties, and I am thankful that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association is looking out. Now, we have seen other grand designs of government unravel in my time here. I remember when I first got here—I hadn't been here very long—and Premier Eves stood in his place and announced that they were going to sell off Hydro. I think members who were here then will remember that. The announcement was barely made when a couple of unions got together and ran to the court; it didn't take very long and that whole process was thrown out. The fact that Ontario Hydro is still in public hands is testament to the fact that the courts will overturn government decisions that are not well-thought-out.

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We have also seen what has happened in British Columbia. Heaven knows, I've heard countless members of the government stand up over many days and talk to my colleagues in the Conservative Party, in the official opposition, about the BC nurses' union case and how the government could not act in the way the official opposition was asking because you were going to find yourself in a whole lot of trouble.

So now we have this. There was a news conference this morning, and I fully expect that a court challenge will be undertaken. This whole thing will be an enormous potential cost to the people of this province. It will be a cost to the taxpayers, who invariably are going to have to foot the bill of any government defence, and of the province. It's going to be a cost to the teachers and the support workers, who are going to have to pay the costs of going to court. It may wind its way all the way to the Supreme Court, as such things often do. It's going to be a cost to the students, because I am afraid there is potentially going to be some acrimony. It's going to be a very real cost to the school boards of this province, the trustees, who have seen their jurisdiction and their real *raison d'être* evaporate.

There is the whole thing about what led up to this. The government likes to talk about having negotiated success-

fully with the Catholic and French teachers and their associations. But the other boards were at one point equally as accommodating. In April 2012, the OSSTF, in meeting with the government negotiators, put down the following conditions that they were willing to abide by in order to get a deal.

They agreed, number one, on a two-year wage freeze. They agreed back in April. What has happened since then that makes the government think that they want a wage increase? They wanted a wage freeze, and they still do.

Back in April, they sat down and said they wanted a retirement incentives program that would allow for more new teachers to be brought on board and perhaps to end the practice, or so much of the practice, of having retired teachers come back in and fill those spaces. When I heard the member from Scarborough—Agincourt talk about this the other day, I think she was heartfelt. We have to make room for new teachers. The OSSTF were prepared to do that as part of the negotiating process.

They also agreed and put forward that they could help the government cut administrative costs in the millions of dollars and showed the government how to do it and how the teachers were willing to take up some of that themselves.

They also talked about running their own employee benefits program at no cost to the government, saving the government tens of millions of dollars.

That's what the teachers sat down and tried to do in April. Then we come fast-forward to August and we have an imposed Bill 115. They were summarily rejected, and I think they've been summarily rejected throughout the process. This is what causes me grief and causes me to be apprehensive about a court challenge. The government says that what happened to the nurses' union in BC may happen here, or at least they used to say that when the Conservatives raised this spectre. The government says now that the teachers are on board. I'm not sure how real that is.

I'd just like to quote the Premier, if I can find that. This is what the Premier had to say to the official opposition on this issue as late as May 31, 2012. I quote the Premier: "I would recommend to them"—the Progressive Conservatives—"that they take a look at a particular decision that dealt with a measure adopted by the British Columbia government. They went ahead in the approach being recommended by my colleague. That matter was taken to court. It involved 9,000 employees and ended up costing BC taxpayers \$85 million because of a mistake made by the BC government. We have 1.2 million public sector employees, and I hesitate to think of the cost that would flow from the mistake were we to adopt this particular approach."

Mr. Speaker, I think my time is up. I think the government has adopted this particular approach. It causes me great apprehension, and I would hope that saner thoughts prevail.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, you may mean questions and comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker: Questions and comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sorry. Questions and comments.

Mr. Bob Delaney: My goodness, what a zealous member from Timmins—James Bay. Thank you very much, in any event, Speaker.

If the entire affair with the discussion of contracts had been conducted with the civility that we have just seen from the member for Beaches—East York, I doubt that we'd be here debating this particular bill. There's a lot that he had to say that I think is very much in accordance with the intent that the minister has pursued ever since the middle of winter.

For example, the key parts to remember here are that teacher and support staff contracts are set to expire on August 31. We've just got to get a little bit of work done here. That's why Ontario has been working with many of those education partners for almost six months to establish that new sustainable education funding framework.

In fact, it's got some results to show, because in July the government signed an agreement with OECTA, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and it represents a road map that balances the need for Ontario to reach the province's fiscal targets and does some of the things that my colleague from Beaches—East York has been advocating: protecting our investments in full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and the classroom experience.

I completely agree with him on that. In fact, that's what this Putting Students First Act is intended to reflect. It's a fair and balanced approach that's going to benefit Ontario's youngest teachers—we shouldn't lose sight of those—and also help preserve 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

There is some momentum behind it because teachers at more than half of Ontario's boards have now signed agreements with the province. Now we need the rest of the teacher unions and the boards to just do the same. So I thank my colleague for his comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments? The member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just dropped my standing orders.

Mr. Speaker, to the member from Beaches—East York, I agree: It's pretty clear what this government's up to. They were trying in the worst possible, desperate way to create a crisis. If they were able to create a crisis and to show that, oh, my God, Dalton McGuinty is going to rise to the crisis and be everybody's saviour, maybe they would be able to do something when it came to the by-elections that was favourable for the fortunes of the Liberals in those by-elections.

The sad part is, and the member pointed it out, that no crisis exists. As the member pointed out, the workers offered a wage freeze for two years before negotiations ever started. The union said, "We withdraw our strike votes. We will not have strike votes." There have been school boards that have said, "Listen, the government is

interfering. We want to have good, fruitful discussions with the unions. We understand that discussions like that take time, they're hard work, and you've got to do some heavy lifting, but that's how you get an agreement." So the government said, "Well, where a crisis doesn't exist, we'll create one à la Snobelen. That way, we'll be able to be seen as trying to do something to stop potential strikes that were never going to happen this fall, and be seen as being tough against teachers," which the government tends to think is a good idea.

So this is really about how many seats in the Legislature this government can win and very little about how many kids are going to be in the classroom come this fall.

I just say to the government across the way: This is a pretty cynical way of approaching politics. I think it leads to the cynicism of voters. I say to those of you who are upset: Don't stay home. Don't be mad. Get to the ballot box and vote against this Liberal administration come next Thursday.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions or comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I listened attentively to the member from Beaches—East York and his comment, "Listen to them. Negotiate with them." I think in fairness, Mr. Speaker, we have worked with our education partners now for over six months to try to reach an agreement, and there are pros and cons—always looking for improvement. At the end of the day, the contract expires tomorrow and we need to address some of the financial constraints and challenges. Everybody has known since February that the contract expires August 31, period. Okay?

The member from Beaches—East York never discussed today that this proposal for the OECTA MOU also talks about fair hiring practices because there are many young teachers whom all of us in this Legislature have spoken to, have heard their concerns. They have completed teachers' college, they have multiple degrees and haven't been able to get a job.

Interjections.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, I don't appreciate being spoken to when I'm speaking. That's totally disrespectful.

We know that we have to support our young teachers. They are now not even on the supply list, Mr. Speaker. This proposed OECTA MOU sets out fair, transparent rules of hiring practices. We need to do everything we can to support the young teachers. That's what they've been asking us to do. They've been asking previous governments, and none came forward. Now we're able to come forward with clear language, transparency and accountability to make sure younger teachers are protected. At the end of the day, there will never be a perfect agreement, but we're doing our very best, especially in this difficult time, and this is the right thing to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions or comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I've been listening to the debate on this for several hours now, and one of the things that I'm really concerned about is that I see this as purely political posturing right now, and I disagree with this totally. Is it about the kids? Are they really making it about the kids? I don't think so. I think they're really making it about their unions, the union bosses, their union buddies, and yet they're trying to come down tough on this. I just have some really serious concerns.

We, as the PC caucus, want to put some amendments to this particular bill to really give it legs. Right now, it's a bill without legs, as we see it. Again, we are concerned about the kids of Ontario. We're concerned about, all of a sudden, if it doesn't get—if it extends—

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Interjection: The guy from way up north.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: The guy from way up north; right.

What we say is this: The kids need to be in school—bottom line. For that regard, we will support this bill. However, it does need to have legs to make it fly better. When we get it into committee, we want to examine it clause by clause.

We believe that principals need to be the ones to decide about a substitute teacher. They need to decide, not the unions. In fact, if I have a child in school and we have a shop teacher who has a lot of seniority and that shop teacher has been asked to fill in in an English class, I suspect that probably it'll be just a spare for the kids and there's no education. They need to be looking at filling the gaps with the most qualified teachers so that these children can still—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member from Beaches–East York, you have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Michael Prue: I thank my colleagues the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, Timmins–James Bay, Scarborough–Agincourt and Chatham–Kent–Essex for what they had to say.

Just a couple of comments: The member from Mississauga–Streetsville said that half of the boards have signed on. I'm not sure how accurate that is. As of Monday, only three out of 72 had signed on. I don't know whether there have been any additions, but I doubt very much that another 35 boards have signed since then. Surely we would have heard of that. It may be up from three, but I don't think it's very much above that.

The member from Scarborough–Agincourt had to talk about the fact that the contract ends tomorrow. Of course, that is true, but a contract ending does not mean that a strike will immediately happen. A contract ending means that the negotiations continue. This is part of the labour law of Ontario, and I think the member should understand that. All that means is that the contract runs out; the old one is in force until a new one is arranged. That is the law of Ontario and has been the law of Ontario for 100 years. In any event, even if that wasn't the case, this is retroactive legislation. This is retroactive, so even if it

takes a month from now before it is ultimately passed, after it has gone through committee and third reading, it's retroactive. So I fail to see really what the point was.

My colleague from Timmins–James Bay said it was a crisis precipitated around an election. He is probably right. I have heard the Conservatives say the same thing. I tried to stay away from that in my speech. I tried to be rational, hoping that some member of the Liberal government would look at the actual history and who is being affected. But, in any event, I understand the motives and what is likely to happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to speak, although I have to say I wasn't sure whether I was going to speak to this bill or not, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. There are lots of members, there was lots being said, and I wasn't sure exactly what I would add to the debate. But, as is often the case, I've found in my political career, I was prodded and poked by the Conservatives, and so that kind of got me going yesterday when I was here. After all, that's how I got here in provincial politics, because of the actions of the Conservatives undermining the education sector and the municipal—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, yes. My first meeting with some of you was from the gallery as I watched those debates, because I felt that the autonomy of the municipalities was being undermined, and I felt that education was being undermined. That's how I got here.

I started to think, after listening to the debate yesterday, that there really are some things that I want to say at this juncture, and I'm not so much going to parse the legislation because, again, that has been done in many ways. I'm not as interested in negotiating or debating the fine points of the negotiation as in thinking about and talking a little bit about the process surrounding where we are, because I believe that this point in our history in Ontario is going to be looked at. It's an important juncture, given who we are as a government and given the trajectory that the province has been on, and maybe it's my training as a mediator that makes me want to look at all sides, and I want to figure out exactly what it is that we're engaged in at this point. So I want to talk a little bit about where we are at this juncture.

First and foremost, what I want to say is that I want to solidly reinforce what the Premier and the Minister of Education have said repeatedly: that it is our first choice—our first choice of a path to a collective agreement is through negotiation. You talk to any member in our party, in our government, and that is our first choice. That is what we wanted; that has always been what we wanted. We believe in the collective bargaining process, and we want it to work in this situation. As it stands now, obviously, it has worked in some of our relationships and in others, it hasn't. That is why we're here debating this legislation. But, as a first principle, that's what we

wanted to have happen. That's how we've behaved, that's how we've operated, since we came into office. So we did not have a personality change. We have not had a personality change. That's what we wanted to happen. That's how we wanted to get to a collective agreement.

That's the first thing that I wanted to speak to, because I find that in these discussions, in this kind of political discourse, these moments in history, the rhetoric gets ramped up and there are white hats and black hats and there are good and bad, and I don't think that serves the people of the province. I think what serves the people of the province is to hear honestly and in a heartfelt way from all of us what we believe, what we want, and where we find ourselves, what we find ourselves having to do.

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I think that people can understand an honest outline of where we've gotten to. What they have trouble with and what they are forced to do in a situation where there's nothing but finger-pointing and blame is, they have to pick a side. I don't think that gives credit to the people of Ontario. I believe we underestimate the people of Ontario a lot, as politicians. I think the people of Ontario can understand complexity, they can understand nuance, and I think we need to pay them the respect not to let ourselves devolve into the sound bite or the rhetoric at every turn. I want people to understand that that was our first choice; that we want, and we still want, that bargaining process.

Secondly, I want to just reflect for a moment on our record in relation to education. We worked on many fronts with teachers, with education support workers, with administrators, to put systems and mechanisms and personnel in place to improve student achievement. We talk a lot about test scores and graduation rates. They have gone up, and that is fantastic. But that's not the whole story, and that's another thing that I think people need to understand. The professional development opportunities; the opportunities to share best practices and to build professional learning environments that we've put in place; the improvements in special education, particularly in the area of autism, that we've put in place; the student success initiatives in secondary schools, like dual credits, that we've put in place to give kids an opportunity to stay in school who otherwise wouldn't stay in school; inclusive education and anti-bullying policies that are now enshrined in legislation—that was Bill 13; smaller class sizes in kindergarten to grade 3; and full-day kindergarten.

I'm outlining this record because I want to draw a distinction between us and the rhetoric of the Conservative opposition, which, as I listened to it yesterday—none of the initiatives that I have outlined were supported by the opposition; none of them. As recently as yesterday, one of the members from the official opposition was heckling that he had come to Queen's Park because of his opposition to secondary school initiatives that helped kids struggling to complete credits. That is the difference between us and them. We have been solidly on the side of publicly funded education for students as a govern-

ment, and that is where we remain as individuals and as a government. That is who we are. That's part of our DNA. That's the work that we've been doing since 2003.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Member from Timmins—James Bay, would you come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me come back, then, to Bill 115 and this moment in our history and our relationship to the education sector. I'm not going to promise, I'm not going to pretend, that it's not a difficult moment, because it is a difficult moment. The member for Nepean—Carlton was sniping at me yesterday that she understood that there had been some disagreement and some discussion in our caucus about this issue. Only a Tory would denigrate a healthy debate. Only someone who does not appreciate the importance of honest, heartfelt discussion would criticize a team that allows that debate, then comes to a conclusion and stands together and takes a stand. That is how we function, and I think to diminish that is to diminish the democratic process, Mr. Speaker.

I am part of a team that has formed one of the strongest, most cohesive governments in Ontario's history. Our leader, Dalton McGuinty, has been a champion of publicly funded education, the system, his entire political career. There were bound to be trying and difficult discussions at the point where we need to find ways to deal with the deficit, a deficit that was a result of a global economic downturn. The party opposite doesn't want to admit that the global economic downturn has brought us to where we are. We had balanced the budget three years in a row. The economy across the globe went down. We had those issues to deal with. So it was expected that we would have to have these difficult conversations because of the economic situation that we find ourselves in.

It pains me personally, and, as I said earlier, I think it pains many of us, that we weren't able to come to a different resolution. But that is the political reality, and I would say to all of us and to everyone in the education sector that we face that reality together now. That's the reality that we are all engaged in. I think that political reality is hard on many people, and the hardest thing about that rhetorical down-spiral that we get into is that natural allies alienate each other for long periods of time. We don't want that to happen. That's not a healthy thing. It's not a healthy thing for the political process and it's not a healthy thing for the education sector. I believe that we are natural allies and that we should try not to alienate each other.

I want to make a final point, and this is a direct appeal to all the people in our publicly funded schools, all the people who work from early in the morning, after school and on the weekends to support our students and provide them with a rich and enthusiastic learning environment. I understand that this is a difficult juncture for you. You have lots of questions. You're part of teams and your staff and your federation, your union or your association. What I hope is that you'll express your confusion, your anger, your questions and your support in those venues. I

hope you'll avail yourselves of their information and resources. I hope you'll talk to all your MPPs and your leadership. Tell them and us what you feel and what you think, and be as frank as you need to be with all of us.

But I say this, not out of any self-interest or in the name of political support: Many of you are teachers or support workers the same age as my children; some of you are older and you are very experienced. Those kids need you. They need you in their clubs; they need you on their teams; they need you in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Don't rob yourselves of those experiences. Those are the places that you bond with kids—at the robotics competitions, at the science fairs, in the orchestras and the bands. Work with those kids.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I would never question the sincerity of my friend the Minister of Municipal Affairs. She started off by saying she wasn't sure if she would participate in this debate, and I'm rather surprised that she did. Certainly, when she was a school board trustee, when we first met her, she made a number of statements about the former government's education policies, and I'm sure this must be a very difficult issue for her personally, to deal with this Bill 115.

I would just ask her a couple of questions, because we've received input from the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. Of course, I know that the member is a former Minister of Education and probably well acquainted with this organization. I personally know the president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, Marino Gazzola, and we've been asked to raise this issue with the government.

The note we've received is asking questions about the fact that the proposed legislation places restrictions on the system-wide use of diagnostic testing and introduces seniority as a key determining factor in the hiring of teachers. The trustees' association is saying that seniority should be the only consideration when assigning a supply teacher or long-term occasional teacher. They go on to say that teachers could opt out of using detailed, student-specific diagnostic testing and they suggest that schools rely on consistent, in-depth assessment tools to track the progress of each student; the value comes from using the same assessment tool over several years and allows for targeted intervention. This would also remove the role of parents and the benefit of the expert team approach school boards currently use to identify and help struggling students.

So I'd just like to ask the Minister of Municipal affairs what she would say in reply to those questions that have been raised by the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I enjoyed the comments by the minister in regard to this particular debate, but I've got to think, as a former school board trustee here in Toronto, if she was in the position of the school board trustees today,

if she was still at that board, she would be in orbit. The fact that the government is essentially meddling in the issues that the boards themselves are normally equipped to do, essentially creating a crisis where a crisis doesn't exist—can you imagine if the Conservative government had done this at a time that the honourable member was a school board trustee? She would have been out in front of Queen's Park. She would have brought in every trustee and everybody that she could, including teachers, saying, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Mike Harris has got to go."

But now it's a bit of a different thing. She's on the other side. She's in the government. I've got to believe that she's a progressive. I know she's a progressive. This has got to be pretty uncomfortable stuff for the minister to be able to deal with, and to boot, this whole thing is time-allocated. The government has now tabled the time allocation motion that says essentially we're going to get about three hours of committee on Wednesday, maybe four; we're going to get an hour and maybe 15 minutes of committee hearings on Thursday morning; and then we're doing clause-by-clause.

1700

I know the minister, like me, believes in the idea of democracy, and I just think that when governments start using time allocations to run roughshod through these types of debates, especially when the legislation is retroactive—nobody in this House is saying this is going to be held up infinitely, but clearly there had to be, and I told the government House leader this, adequate time at committee for people to be heard. I've got to believe that as a former school board trustee, the honourable member would be leading the charge and she'd be saying, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Dalton McGuinty, time to go," if you were on the other side.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thought the speech was excellent by the member, by the former education minister. I think one thing she emphasized, which is so very true, is that there isn't anybody I know in the government caucus or the government cabinet who wanted to see this solved by legislation. I think there was a genuine hope back in February, knowing it would be difficult, but a genuine hope back in February that this would indeed be resolved through negotiation, tough negotiation at that.

It's always a luxury—I know where the Conservatives stand. I read Tim Hudak's article in the Star. It said, "Oh, you've spent far too much money on education. You've been too good to the field of education." I understand that. I don't agree with it, but I understand it.

But my friends in the New Democratic Party have the luxury of being in opposition. I had that as well. You'd be interested to know that I've had some very frank discussions with people who have denounced you over the social contract. Now, I'm not out there publicly defending you, but I'm going to tell you I've explained to them why the government, in the circumstances it faced in the midst of a tough recession in the 1990s, brought forward the measures that it did—not because they're

anti-labour, not because they hate people in the teaching profession or others in the public service, but because they faced a very difficult set of choices.

The same is true in Saskatchewan, and I've brought the book *Minding the Public Purse* into this House on many occasions. The public won't read this, but I hope members of the Legislature will. It's written by Dr. Janice MacKinnon, who was the NDP finance minister in Saskatchewan in the most difficult times, when one of the things they did was close 52 rural hospitals. Is it because the NDP hated health care or the people of Saskatchewan? It was confronted with difficult circumstances, and it had to act that way. And I suggest that if you weren't in opposition today, you'd be much more sympathetic to the position the government finds itself in today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I think my number one question today here is, I'm wondering when we talk about clarity what that actually defines and what that means, because I think people are more confused than they ever were, and I can say, going out and talking to the constituents in our area, that they'd like to know what your form of clarity is, because they're more confused than they were yesterday and the day before that.

You know, the situation is that you're in a position right now—this afternoon, actually, we were talking about saving \$354 million for the horse racing, but when you take into account that we spend \$1.8 million more than we take in, that money is gone within nine to 10 days. So, to me, when we look at things, we have to look at all the band-aids that we have actually done at this point.

I guess my point is that people really want to know what clarity we have and what we can do to make the situation better. People are confused. They feel they're being vilified, one against the other. I can say in my office—I can't speak for anybody else—I do have trustees, boards coming in, and they're more confused than anybody else and just looking for some form of clarity.

I guess the bottom line is that you do the proper thing, which is the protocol. You sit down, you get into a room and get everybody in there to have an open discussion to figure out where you move forward with that. Doing everything at the last hour confuses people more so than it did the hour before that, and it ends up that you vilify one against the other so people don't really know what the problem was in the first place and how they got to where they are.

I think most people here today just want to know—the word “rhetoric” is thrown out today or “clarity” is thrown out, but how do you say that when things are more confused than they were just two minutes prior to that?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, you've got two minutes to reply.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the comments of my colleagues.

I say to the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, I don't really want to go into—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm sure you don't.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, we talked about the fair hiring and the diagnostics. I think there were some changes made to the settlement, and there's been a conversation about those; I understand that. Again, those were details that had been worked out first at the negotiation table with two of the federations and then in conversation with the Conservatives.

But I was trying to make a broader point about the trajectory we found ourselves on, that we wanted to come to a collective agreement through a negotiated process. That didn't work.

To the member for Burlington, just for some clarity, we had said that if we couldn't get there, we were going to put in place legislation. That's not what we wanted to do, but that's where we have ended up.

I say to the member for Timmins–James Bay, this is my team. This is the team that I am on and this is the team that has led the charge on improving publicly funded education since 2003. It's one of the platforms that we came in on, it's the work that we've been doing and it's the work that we want to continue doing. We have some natural allies in the education sector and we want to keep working with those people.

My driving motivation for speaking is that I really believe those relationships are the most important thing that we have going for us in terms of education in the province. I want everyone in the education sector to have the best year possible. I want them to be able to take part fully in their school year. Talk to us and deal with us in whatever way you have to, but please have a great school year.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: First of all, I'd like to say I'm very grateful to our critic for education, the MPP for Nepean–Carleton, and also to our leader, Tim Hudak, for having shown leadership on this file.

First and foremost, when you look at everything that has happened, I think people mostly want to stand and hear what we have to say and to understand how we got here today. I understand what you say when you're saying it was the right thing to do. But if you'd done the proper protocol and the right thing in the first place, we wouldn't be sitting here doing what we're doing right now.

I want to start by saying that when you don't have a leader, you have chaos, which we can see we have had over this time. When you lose control of finance, you lose control of your destiny. We have clearly done that at this point right now. Someone's behaviour in the past is indicative of what they're going to do in the future, so I stand here and look and I think about a few things.

First and foremost, I think of how we've worked in the past and how situations—I'll just give you one example. Your wage freeze on Ontario public service managers has reportedly saved \$34 million since 2009, but in 2011

alone, your government paid bonuses totalling \$36 million to 98% of civil service managers.

Interjection.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: OPS. Some estimates peg those performance bonuses at around \$130 million since 2009. To recap for you: \$34 million saved, \$130 million spent. I look at how you've done in the past with that—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Speaker, on a point of order: I want to quote, I believe, 23(b) in our standing orders: "Directs his or her speech to matters other than ... the question under discussion." I'll just have you rule on that, Mr. Speaker, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you for the point of order. I'd just ask the member to keep her comments to what is in front of us.

The member for Burlington.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you. In regard to Bill 115, the government commissioned the Drummond report and then swept aside half of its recommendations. This government still has no credible economic development strategy to fix the problem in front of them, no action plan, and no road map that will restore balance.

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We're moving toward Dalton days. For the last nine years, this government has thrown money at everything under the sun with little thought to anything but the marketing plan. There is a deficit that is more threatening than \$15 billion, and that's the leadership deficit we're seeing from this government. The government likes to assign blame everywhere else than their own actions, but even if you believe that line of reasoning, there's no sign that the government is learning the lessons of a wider world. Reckless leadership, government that is arrogant and entitled does more harm to Ontario than all of these imaginary causes. We, alone, are to blame if we fail to take control of our own destinies and overcome the obstacles in our path. We must meet the challenges of today with clear eyes and confidence.

Ontario PC leader Tim Hudak has been clear and consistent. He doesn't want to derail a school year; nor do I. As a matter of fact, the Ontario PC caucus would prefer no disturbances at all so that our kids can be in the classrooms, laying the foundation for their future. We would prefer that the Liberal government would finally come around and enact the broader public sector wage freeze that the Ontario PC caucus has been calling for since the last election. Maybe we'll get there yet. We're seeing signs that there has been a change of heart across the floor, which might explain why, after years of asking for pay freezes from the public sector while dishing out bonuses and spending hand over fist, we're seeing this government show up with something that vaguely resembles a wage freeze. True, it's a baby step on the long road back to getting Ontario back on track, but it's an encouraging sign.

This August, Ontario PCs were essentially looking at two choices. We could go with the government's business-as-usual approach and green-light a 5.5% pay increase when the province clearly could not afford it, or

we could pause the pay increase for a portion of the public sector, take comfort in the fact that our kids will be able to go back to their classrooms come September and keep working towards a broader public sector wage freeze.

This bill is the first sign that the Ontario government has had a moment of clarity, had their five minutes of truth. After nine long years, they have finally realized that the cupboards are bare and their spending is out of control. This government has run out of money, and now it's running out of fumes.

Ontario can't buy labour peace any more. The province has over a million government employees and around 4,000 collective agreements. The government's status quo approach to reining in labour costs will not get the job done. The province needs what the finance minister has referred to as a true zero freeze, and more than that, it needs strong, decisive action. It needs real leadership. Our party will continue to promote the bold ideas needed to curb spending, balance the books and pay down our debt.

In conclusion of that today, I'd like to also say that, at this particular moment, \$500 billion in Canadian companies is being held because of insecurity in times of where we are right now. Even the federal government has said to reinvest in your companies or pay dividends to shareholders to get this economy going. We have not given an economy for people to either want to stay here—capital's mobile. Bay Street knows it. We have high debt, high taxes and high hydro. People aren't going to stay, and they're not going to want to come in.

We need to create an environment after nine years to make it the place where people want to be, to flourish, to grow. We can't just talk about the band-aid effects that you're talking about on how to cut spending. We need to have an economic development strategy on how to move forward to make things better.

The Premier doesn't want to be known as the Rae days. He wants to be known for what he's doing to move forward from here. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm very happy to be able to finally join this debate. I hadn't had the opportunity all week.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a two-minuter.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I know it's two minutes, I know, and I'm going to get it all in in two minutes.

I want to tell you, to the minister across the way, I drop my kids off at school every morning. They are the most precious things that I have in my life, that I would give anything for. I know you feel the same way, Madam Minister, and so does any good parent, godparent, step-parent, anyone who minds children in this province.

We trust, when we put them on the bus or when we drop them off at the front doors of that school in our small communities, that the teachers who are there are not only going to teach them, of course—that is their job—but they're going to protect them, they're going to

challenge them, they're going to love them and help them and push them.

Those are the things that I see out of the teachers in the school, Pavillon des Jeunes in Belle River, that my kids go to. They have gone to full-day kindergarten for the last eight years, prior to this government's position on full-day kindergarten, or imposition of it.

Hon. James J. Bradley: So you support it now. That's good.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a great idea, of course. It's something that makes sense.

But what I want to ask the government is—your decision to take away the rights of the teachers is telling them that they're not worth it. I think that's the clear message that you're sending: They're not worth the value that we hope they instill in our children, and we're not going to value them because of the economic conditions in the province.

Hopefully I'll get a chance to hit on it again. I'm going to save one of those bullet points for my next speech. That's what the school system means to me and, I know, other parents across the province. I hope this government realizes how valuable our system is.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It becomes an increasingly interesting debate because on one side you have one of the parties, the official opposition, the Conservative Party, saying, *holus-bolus*, "Just jump in and put a wage freeze on everybody in the public sector. You don't have to go through any negotiations first. You don't have to do any preparation. Just bring in legislation and do it."

On the other side, when the government brought in legislation after a number of months of discussion and negotiation, the NDP predicted—and I think it's a pretty easy prediction, as I think the member for Beaches–East York conceded; I don't want to put words in his mouth. But there's almost an expectation that with legislation of this kind we're going to see litigation taking place. I think that's an expectation that we have to accept as a government and as a Legislature.

The NDP has hung its hat on its opposition to this bill, I think largely on the fact that, "Well, at least I've listened to the leader. It's going to cost the province millions upon millions of dollars in legal costs."

The difference—and you have not differentiated, and I don't blame you; your job is not to defend us, it's to find an appropriate wedge, and I accept that. But the difference between the situation with—what the Conservative Party is recommending is no pre-negotiations to it, simply the hammer coming down. What the courts clearly indicated was, that won't work. The courts will not accept that. What the courts will accept, in our opinion, is an effort at negotiations. We notice today, for instance, news that the college teachers' union has proposed to the college teachers that they accept a contract that has two years with zero increase, and we recognize that there are some negotiated settlements.

I go back to the fact that our government would have preferred a negotiated settlement. It simply was not possible. Just as with the NDP in years gone by, we were compelled to take different kinds of action.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to compliment the member for Burlington on the speech that she gave in the Legislature just now. I think she offered, in a very sincere and open way, the views of her constituents in the riding of Burlington with respect to Bill 115, and not only that, the overall education issues that we all try to work through and confront.

I think she put on the record a number of very accurate statements, obviously, about the position that our caucus is taking with respect to this bill and the broader issue of the overall cost of salaries in the broader public sector. Certainly, we've been consistent in putting forward the view that the deficit is a ticking time bomb for the next generations. Certainly, the Don Drummond report confirmed that if nothing is done in terms of spending restraint, we're most likely on a path to an explosion of the provincial debt and a debt of something like \$411 billion, I believe, by 2017-18. I think most people in my riding certainly understand that if you're digging a hole, the longer you continue digging and the deeper you get in that hole, the more difficult it is to get out of it.

1720

Obviously, we've taken a very practical approach to this issue and the issue of pay in the broader public sector. We believe that it would be fair and reasonable to freeze the pay of those who are in the employ of the provincial government as well as the broader public sector for a two-year period so as to ensure that we're taking meaningful steps to reduce the deficit. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to have to undergo a larger prioritization exercise. We're going to have to take a thorough evaluation of all the government's spending if we're going to balance the budget. Certainly, the Don Drummond report provides a road map. It may not provide all the answers, but to the extent that the government rejects some of the recommendations in the Drummond report—like his recommendation that the government at least put off the full implementation of full-day junior kindergarten—the fact is, they have to find some offsets or we won't balance the budget by 2017-18.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member raises a good point, and that is the government, aside from saying that they were going to—well, they didn't say that they were going to create a crisis, but they effectively tried to create a crisis for their own reasons.

They also said, "Oh, my God, this Legislature isn't working." I remember the House leader of the government side, I think it was this week or last week, saying, "Nothing happens in this place and it's slow as molasses." I just think about the opportunity the gov-

ernment lost this morning. The government could have called Bill 2, the bill for the seniors' tax credit. The government could have called Bill 50, the ambulance act that the Minister of Health and the Premier talked about today. What did they do? They didn't call a government bill that's currently on the order paper that's topical and, I would argue, that some constituencies want. Instead, they decided, "Oh, there's a by-election, so let's talk about something we did two years ago so that we can try to put the Conservatives in a tighter spot and, at the same time, we can be seen as, 'Ah-ah-ahhhhhh! Look how great we are!'" It's like the Tarzan thing, right? Well, I've got to say, it's really, really—

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's a bad Tarzan impersonation.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know it's a bad Tarzan thing, Jim. I understand, because I'm not as good as Tarzan. Tarzan—he was the real thing; I was just imitating him.

But anyway, my point is the government has really been trying to sell two lines. They're trying to sell one line—"Oh, we can't make Parliament work and that's why we need a majority." Well, my God, it doesn't work why? Because they're filibustering their own legislation. They brought in a motion this morning on something that was already decided two years ago, that is currently being funded, and the motion means absolutely nothing but political rhetoric and a way of trying to jam the Conservatives. Then they do what they're doing now in regards to school boards and teachers.

Clearly, this government understands it's trying to help its own political situation. They're trying to advance what's going on in those by-elections. I think that's wrong, and I think those who are upset with the government should vote against them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Burlington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It was a privilege to be able to get up and speak today. Number one, only being here almost a year coming up on October 6, it's always confusing to me to sit here and to watch everything going back and forth, because there is some form of manipulation with everybody's words at times. But at the end of the day, I took this position and was blessed to get this position, and I come in here for my constituents of Burlington to work as hard as I possibly can.

But I also come to be as honest as I possibly can and to give them the answers that they need and want. What they want is to know where we stand after nine years. What they want is to know how we're going to make it better and what are the big-picture things. They're sick and tired of looking at the band-aids, with the horse racing, with the savings of \$354 million. In 10 days that was spent; that's long gone. They're looking for us to figure out how to get the economy going again and how to make it the best place it can possibly be.

It's symbolic to say that for the first time ever we're receiving equalization payments. If that doesn't speak

enough about the government of Ontario, then I don't know what does.

It's frightening for my children, my grandchildren, my constituents, your children and your grandchildren that all they're going to inherit is a massive debt because of arrogance and an entitlement to do things that are not in the best interests of the Ontario people. I'm sad to stand in this House because right now we are trying to do what is fiscally responsible. We have our leader, Tim Hudak, who has been consistent over and over again. I am thrilled to stand with him, beside him and with the rest of my PCs who honestly believe that they're doing the best job they possibly can. I'm also thrilled with our education critic, like I said. She took the lead on this file, so thank you for all of us as PCs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. Ten minutes? Great. I'll start off where I left off, I guess.

I want to touch on our economic conditions here that ultimately have precipitated this rather rash decision on behalf of the government to legislate collective agreements on our province's teachers. One of the conditions is obviously the provincial deficit, the fact that we're floating somewhere around \$13 billion to \$14 billion at a time where, most recently, this government has continued on a path of giving away multiple multi-year tax cuts to the largest corporations in the province—cheered on by, of course, the official opposition, who see that as one of the mantras of fiscal prudence and economic generation, which it actually isn't. I don't want you to take my word for it. Take that of the finance minister, Jim Flaherty. Take his word for it, because just recently he has called on the largest corporations in this country—him as well as the governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney—to stop hoarding their cash. They are hoarding.

Mr. Michael Prue: Five hundred billion bucks.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, this year, they are \$280 billion in surplus, excess cash just waiting to be spent. They're saying, "Get that out the door. With these tax cuts that we've been giving you for decades now, we thought you were going to reinvest that into the economy." Ultimately, it hasn't been reinvested. Now you've got Jim Flaherty stating that he needs that money out into the economy.

That's what our teachers do in this province. We pay them well. Guess what they do? They buy cars, they buy homes, they buy groceries. And they do it locally a lot of the time, too. They understand the importance of supporting their communities, as do a whole host of our public sector workers, who understand that if you work for the province—you know what?—you should invest back into the province. One of the reasons, I believe, that this province made it out of the recession of 2008 relatively unscathed is because our public sector actually had some financial stability and those workers were able to make those large purchases to keep our economy going.

But what you're saying now is that because there's still a lingering presence of economic doldrums in this province and because of the debt that you've accumulated on various mismanagement exploits, it will be up to the teachers to make up that balance. Of course, the only way for you to get there is to impose a legislated collective agreement upon them, where in fact throughout the last several months they have clearly indicated to this government, to the Minister of Education, that they were prepared to take a 0% wage increase. It's something that has been fully nuanced, well articulated, clearly presented to all government sides.

What I think we have here, Mr. Speaker—let me rephrase this: What we have here is a failure to negotiate.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: A failure to negotiate.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Merci, Madame. I thought you'd catch on to that.

What we have here is a failure to negotiate, and we've seen some precedent for this. We've seen a history of this government not being able to negotiate. They weren't able to negotiate an agreement with our Ornge air ambulance service, one that didn't have massive loopholes in it. They weren't able to negotiate a gas-fired hydro plant in Mississauga in the right location—or in Oakville and Mississauga. They weren't able to negotiate with those—

1730

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I just want to bring to your attention a very important section of our standing orders, 23(b): "directs his or her speech to matters other than,

"(i) the question under discussion; or

"(ii) a motion or amendment that he or she intends to move; or

"(iii) a point of order."

I would suspect on our standing orders the member from Essex is drifting somewhat, and I'll leave it in your capable hands, Mr. Speaker, to rule.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would just ask the member to somehow bring the discussion back to what's in front of us. I would also remind other members, too, because some of the questions and comments were straying quite a bit.

The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believed my comments were topical in that they related to negotiation and bargaining, and that's obviously what has led to this piece of legislation in front of us today.

But, you know, we hear the government change the narrative, and we heard it last night. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to join the debate last night, but I heard the narrative change on that side of the benches. For years and years and years, decades, you called those in the education system "partners" and you called those who lobbied on behalf of our education workers, our teachers—those who represented them in collective bargaining—"partners." You called them "associates." You

called them "professionals." But now we hear the narrative that they are "union bosses" who are attempting to flex their might.

Hon. James J. Bradley: We never used that.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Oh, I heard it last night. I heard it last night, and I'll tell you, it's interesting, because I heard that same narrative—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's their language.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No, I'm looking at the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You never heard the Premier say that.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I heard it, and I'll give you the opportunity, of course, to correct yourself.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would you speak through the Chair, please.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I can tell you where I heard it also today: on the front lawn of Queen's Park where horse people were gathering. The Leader of the Opposition talked about the union bosses as well—

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yeah, I know, he did, when in fact one of those union bosses, the head of the CAW, Ken Lewenza, has thrown his support behind the horse racing association.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Let me get back on the topic.

It has been quite clearly proven that this legislation will be challenged in the courts immediately. Who knows how long that process will drag on? Maybe that's the intent, to bury this in the courts so that people forget about it, they'll forget about the damage that has been done. But we won't forget about it. Certainly we've heard that the teachers won't forget about it, because what you have done is completely abdicated your responsibility in sitting down and negotiating. The teachers and the associations I've spoken with have very clearly identified that they were willing to work with you, as willing partners. But we understand that, at some point in this government's life, they will have to make a move to actually justify their existence.

We see that actually happening right now as the final days of the by-election campaign in Kitchener–Waterloo draw to a close and you attempt to disguise some of the failures that this government has had over the last eight years by, obviously, creating this crisis. It's been very well explained, and I get it. I'm new here, but I couldn't imagine that one seat would be so important that you would not only manufacture a crisis but go full on with it, take it to the full extreme and absolutely create havoc in our education system: fear when there shouldn't be, distraction when we can't afford to have distraction in this province, and a real lack of leadership, ultimately a complete lack of leadership, when our kids are the most vulnerable in this fight here now.

We know that there's no hard way to negotiating. That's why. It's hard. It takes a lot of effort. Okay.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: We still can.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: We still can. Well, take your legislation off the table and get back to the bargaining table. If you still think you can do it, then put all your efforts into negotiation. That is called good faith, a measure that this government hasn't shown throughout the entire process. If you don't think that's going to have a lasting effect on your political fortunes, then you are very much mistaken.

Finally, those who will suffer in the short and the long term will be the children in our school system and those wonderful teachers and educational professionals who dedicate their lives each and every day, each and every morning, to ensuring that we get the best-quality education we possibly can.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very much pleased to have added some comments to today's debate. It is probably one of the most important we will have in this session. I look forward to continuing it with my colleagues. Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: On a point of order, Speaker: I would ask that the member try to correct his record. I was actually quoting the member for Trinity-Spadina, who was suggesting that they were intimidated by union leaders and that we should have learned, that we should be backing down. I was very clear in my remarks that the only time—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, it's not a point of order. I do not believe the member made specific comments as to who. He was all over the map.

Questions and comments? The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm sure he was referring to the Conservatives, who like to call people who are the head of unions "union bosses." They make no apologies for it; to their credit, they don't make any apologies for it. I don't agree with them, but there we are.

I want to draw a contrast for the member, who is a new member of the Legislature. I enjoy his remarks, and I do want to recommend to him the book *Minding the Public Purse* by Dr. Janice MacKinnon, former NDP Minister of Finance in Saskatchewan from, I think, 1993 to 1997. She mentions in her book, "I consulted" my good friend "Floyd Laughren about the circumstances confronted by governments in difficult economic times in the mid-1990s." What I want to contrast here is the NDP in opposition and the NDP in government. To be fair, and you know how I always like to be fair, one could say of a lot of political parties that when they're in opposition they don't say exactly what they say when in government. There's a group of people out there who have become disenchanted with the NDP, as I mentioned in my previous remarks. I was trying to explain to them the social contract, that the NDP was not anti-labour, that the NDP wasn't trying to be mean to people. It was confronted with very challenging economic circumstances. They tried, I think, to negotiate, as we have tried to negotiate.

To their credit, some of the teachers' federations have made those efforts. We've seen some contracts concluded by some of them. At the present time I notice, for instance, that the OSSTF is endeavouring to obtain some contracts with local boards. I think there has been some goodwill, but it has been extremely challenging under these circumstances.

But I want to point out to the member that he should always look at what the NDP has done when given the levers of power compared to what the NDP has said when it's in opposition. It's a difficult challenge for you, I realize.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'd very much like to follow up on the comments of the member for St. Catharines. Quite frankly, each of the parties try to do the best they can with the situations that develop, as the member from St. Catharines mentioned regarding the social contract and certainly when the Conservatives were in power and the transfer of funds that took place, and how they tried to deal with those issues.

But I think some of the issues are not quite being dealt with here. From my perspective, we seem to be dealing with the symptoms and not the cause of the problem. I'm not referring to provincial spending in any aspect. I'm referring more to the party perspective and that you need to play that sword and thrust and parry, but also the cultural mindset that takes place within many sectors within the community and how we have to address those issues and try to make sure that we move forward in the best interests of all the people in the province of Ontario.

We look to the recent past, to the dealings with the doctors. You know, today's clippings kind of sends up a trial balloon of what the expectation may be with what's coming with police and fire. I would also hope the government is looking at some aspects and what we're hearing about posters at the bus stops now, OPSEU and the flyers being sent out within that community because they think they're next on the list. Today's clippings would certainly indicate that police and fire would be more easily discussed or are being discussed at this time.

Some of the questions that I hope the government would be able to answer is that I'm hearing on the radio stations in Peterborough, for example, whereby in the sector being dealt with currently they're saying they agreed to a full-time two-year wage freeze but that's not happening. They're saying it's more a matter of the government taking control of the boards to make decisions on behalf of the boards.

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I would certainly hope that the government would be able to answer some of these ads that we're hearing out there so that the populace at large can understand and then, quite frankly, we actually deal with the cause and not constantly deal with the symptom of what's happening in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The cause of the problem is simply the government. That's the answer to the question.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Oh, that's easy.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, seriously. Who is the one who is creating the crisis here? My colleague the member from—Essex—Kent?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Just Essex.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just Essex. Okay, I got it wrong. My colleague the member from Essex made the point very, very clearly that the government is trying to create a crisis in education where one doesn't exist. You were quite right: The offer at the beginning of all this was a two-year wage freeze. God, I've negotiated on the employer's side, and if somebody came to me and said, "Listen, my opening position is a two-year wage freeze," it would be a lot easier.

It's heavy lifting. You've got to sit down; you've got to work out the details. The government says, "No, we're not going to do that. It's more important that we have a crisis. We don't want to deal with the facts; let's deal with the crisis. Because if we have a crisis, we can go into the by-elections and say, 'Look at how good we are at dealing with them bad old people who don't want to go and teach. Oh, my God, who's going to stand and talk for the kids?'" Well, these guys aren't doing nothing for the kids. Quite frankly, all they're doing is helping themselves. They're saying, "Listen, if we create a crisis and we can get people looking up here rather than at the Ornge scandal, rather than at \$180 million to settle the Mississauga gas plant, rather than look at eHealth," rather than looking at what they've done to the horse racing industry and are doing, "if we can get them looking up here, they might forget about the litany of bad, bad decisions we've made as a government for the last nine years and maybe, just maybe, they'll forget when it comes to voting in the by-elections."

Let's be real. This is about Liberals trying to do what Liberals do best: being political opportunists in order to try to influence the outcomes of by-elections. That's all this is about.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's a pleasure for me to stand up today to speak on this issue. First, let me thank all the teachers in my riding, Ottawa—Vanier. We have the most wonderful schools in my riding. We have excellent management in our schools. We have excellent teachers, and the results show. Look at the results of the schools in my riding. They're excellent.

I'm very proud of l'AEFO and OECTA, but let me talk about l'AEFO. They agreed with the proposal. My question today is, why is it good for OECTA and l'AEFO and not good for the others? My question is redirected to you.

I know that it's not just the wage freeze that is on the table. There are other issues, like the accumulated sick leave. I know it's a very touchy issue, because when I was a nurse this was eliminated, in 1978. I had 350 days;

this was eliminated. So I know it's a very, very touchy issue.

I want to reiterate that we have a son who is a teacher. We have a son who is trying to get full-time, and he cannot because of all the rules and regulations. It's not an easy topic to deal with, and I wanted to associate myself with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

I'm very proud of what we've done as a government to improve the education system, but thanks to our good teachers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Essex, you've got two minutes for a response.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to give thanks to all of my colleagues who joined the debate. I didn't take your names down, so I won't be able to name you, but you know who you are.

In 2008 the global economy hit the wall, and we're still feeling the effects—am I correct here? Because we continue to talk about how we are in a stagnant economy: productivity rates, job losses, job numbers haven't grown. There's no real growth. But what you're saying is that to make up for that, we're going after the teachers. That's what you're saying today: "We're going after you." They said, "Okay, we understand you're in a difficult position. We're going to give you zero, zero on a raise. We're not going to take anything this year; we're not going to take anything next year." You said, "We want less than zero." You know who needs to get back into school? It's the Liberal benches, because you can't get less than zero. You can only pull more and more and more away from the workers in this province and the teachers who add so much value to our economy. That's what you did. I'll tell you, it is going to be a sad semester across this province.

Mr. Paul Miller: A lot of morale problems.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: A lot of morale problems, a lot of difficulties, where students are going to, I'm certain, feel that tension—that they don't need. It's tension that didn't have to be created. It's a crisis that could have been absolutely averted. How? You negotiate under the parameters of fair and free collective bargaining in the province of Ontario. Do you disagree with that? If you do, ultimately, you stand with our friends in the opposition. They don't like it; they don't want to do it; they can't do it.

That's the other thing: the business elite who want to get rid of the unions, similar to what's happening here. That's business. This isn't negotiating. You can't sit down across the table and negotiate? It happens every day in boardrooms around the globe, and you can't do it with a group of teachers who have already told you they were ready to deal and ready to work with you. Instead, you've created a crisis and gambled with our kids' future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for York West.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to have a few minutes and hopefully add to the debate.

I have been listening very carefully from the beginning, since we introduced this bill, and I have listened to most members on both sides, including our own side, and I'm very pleased to see, first of all, that we have the support of the Conservative caucus on this bill.

I have been listening very attentively as speakers addressed the various issues, or, if I may, non-issues of the bill. I have to say that we as legislators come into this chamber and we bring our own individual brand of passion to the particular debate. The passion may vary based on whatever may be on the table for discussion. I have to say that some of us in the House may deliver that particular message with a different zest, with a different passion and with a different spirit. That may be part of being colleagues in this House. If we agree or disagree, that's another story. Who is right and who is wrong? I think that sentiment goes around in this House.

The fact is that some of my colleagues have been addressing it as a façade: "It's because of a by-election." Let me get this out of the way before my time runs out, Speaker. The by-election in Kitchener–Waterloo was not our doing. It was not our doing.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, oh. The by-election in Kitchener–Waterloo wasn't your doing? You offered her a job.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: She could have waited to resign. She could have waited.

Mr. Michael Prue: One hundred and eighty-seven thousand reasons.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: She could have waited till the next election.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I have order?

Mr. Mario Sergio: When it comes to my colleague on the NDP side, I was very much taken yesterday by my colleague from Trinity–Spadina and the member from Bramalea–Gore—

Mr. Paul Miller: Malton.

Mr. Mario Sergio: —Malton. I have to say, with respect to my colleague—because we all say what we want to say in this House in the pretense that whatever we say is right. The way people interpret it outside, because we have these wonderful cameras—it's up to the people how they will interpret it. I have to say to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton there—he says it's a distraction. Well, this is a very important issue; it's not a distraction.

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But I was more taken by my colleague for Trinity–Spadina's remarks when he said yesterday, "Why would you go and destroy what you have built over several years and the love that you have acquired with the teachers and the unions, the respect? Now you're going to lose it all." I have to say this, and I say it really, truly—and I want to address especially the teachers, Speaker, and then I'll tell you who the teachers are. When this is over and done, we will be enjoying more love, more understanding from the teachers and the

teachers' unions because they will understand exactly what we are trying to accomplish here.

Speaker, if we didn't make those difficult decisions five, six, seven, years ago, we wouldn't have the quality of education that—they are saying we have the best education in the world. If we have the best education in the world, it was not up to them. It was up to the difficult decisions that Dalton McGuinty and this government made a few years ago.

Today, we can see why those decisions were made, Speaker. We can see that. It wasn't me the other day but Buzz Hargrove—I think we all know who Buzz Hargrove is. He said the other morning that we have the best education system in the world. Hallelujah, hallelujah. Do we really need Buzz Hargrove to tell us that we have the best education system in the world? But it was refreshing to know.

So, in answer to my colleague from Trinity–Spadina, I have to say—

Mr. Paul Miller: Where's that Rosario?

Mr. Mario Sergio: It was Rosario, my good colleague. I have to say this: He's got a wonderful point. But the point is this, Speaker: How did we get to bring the education system in Ontario to be in the best in the world? How did we do it?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You started with Mike Harris's system.

Mr. Mario Sergio: It was not Mike Harris. We pumped—

Interjections.

Mr. Mario Sergio: They don't want to hear it. They don't want to hear it, Speaker.

We have sunk billions of dollars into the education system. Today, we have the best teachers in the world.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Timmins–James Bay and the member for Essex, come to order, please.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I've been listening to all of you very politely. I think you could concede that particular time, but given who they are, Speaker, it bothers them.

Let me say this on behalf of our teachers, Speaker: Who are our teachers? Who are our teachers, Speaker?

Interjection: Our brothers and sisters, everybody.

Mr. Mario Sergio: You got it. They are families, fathers, mothers, part of our community, and they have kids as well. They have kids as well that they take to the cottage, and they have kids that they take to do shopping to get ready for the new school year. How would they feel, Speaker, this coming weekend, being a long weekend, under the threat of the school year not going to be open? What are we going to do? I think it's time that we take it seriously as legislators and say—and it would be a wonderful thing if we could do it. If we could give credence that we come into this House with the best knowledge to deliver the best we can do for our people, Speaker, it would be wonderful.

The fact is that if we were able to do that, Speaker, we would do all the best for the people without splitting our

people out there, Speaker. We could do that, but we don't. You know why, Speaker? Because we tend to be human and we tend to play politics. But you know what, Speaker? When all this is over, the people out there will understand that this was the right thing to do, the best thing to do.

Speaker, we have this wonderful commodity that is called time. They have time. We have time. We all have time. It is what we do. It is what we do with this particular time. The fact is, Speaker, that since February, six months ago, we have spent considerable time to come to an agreement. You know what, Speaker? We cannot set sail on yesterday's wind. We cannot do that. Therefore, I think it's important that we give our teachers, that we give our kids, that we give our taxpayers peace of mind, knowing that the schools will be open next week, that the teachers will be going to school next week, that our constituents and taxpayers know that the school will be open. I think that's important.

When you look at the content of the legislation, I don't think it's that difficult for our teachers to understand, because they are professional people. Do you know why it was so important for our Premier to do the best, to sink in billions of dollars and produce the best education system and the best teachers? Because our future best teachers will come from today's education. That is exactly why, Speaker.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: That's a good line.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Therefore, as my time is coming to a close, let me say this, Speaker.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a good line.

Mr. Mario Sergio: It is a good line because it is a fact. Sometimes we think teachers are this very strange group of people. Well, you know what? Our neighbours—sometimes we shovel our own driveways together with them, and they could be a teacher. They go shopping. We see them all over the place: at church, at the coffee shop. Speaker, they are taxpayers as well. I know, when it's over and done, Speaker—and I hope that we can get this over with soon—we're still going to have their respect and they will have our respect. We will have our love for them and they will have their love for us.

I thank you, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Seeing the time on the clock, I'm tempted to adjourn, but before I do, I would ask all members to join me in thanking the pages for giving up their summer vacation and being here with us. Many are moving on to grade 9, so we would like to wish them the best, since they're moving on.

With that, we're adjourned until Tuesday, September 4, at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	

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Piruzza, Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakubski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
Vacant	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Vacant	Vaughan	

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Jonah Schein
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Phil McNeely, Norm Miller
Reza Moridi, Jerry J. Ouellette
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Ernie Hardeman, Tracy MacCharles
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Jane McKenna
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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No. 73

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**First Session, 40th Parliament**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**Première session, 40^e législature**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)****Journal
des débats
(Hansard)****Tuesday 4 September 2012****Mardi 4 septembre 2012**Speaker
Honourable Dave LevacPrésident
L'honorable Dave LevacClerk
Deborah DellerGreffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 4 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 4 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT (BOARD OF
INTERNAL ECONOMY), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(COMMISSION DE RÉGIE INTERNE)

Mr. Milloy, on behalf of Mr. Gerretsen, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to the Board of Internal Economy /
Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la Commission de régie interne.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT (BOARD OF
INTERNAL ECONOMY), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(COMMISSION DE RÉGIE INTERNE)

Mr. Milloy, on behalf of Mr. Gerretsen, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to the Board of Internal Economy /
Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la Commission de régie interne.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION
TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT
POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT
AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 28, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit /
Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back, by the way; it's a pleasure to see you there.

It's also a pleasure and a privilege, always, to stand in this House and to speak about the business before us. Unfortunately, with this bill, there's not much before us. What is before us is a fairly modest, to put it succinctly—very modest—gift to seniors—if and only if they put money up front. They can spend up to \$10,000, of which they get 15% back. Now we in opposition have been talking about the difficulty most seniors in our jurisdictions have spending \$10,000 on improvements that will allow them to stay in their homes. The government side will come back at us and say, “But you don't have to spend all \$10,000; you can spend only a few hundred dollars,” but I mean, really, getting \$15 back in a tax receipt at the end of the year is hardly an incentive to widen one's hallways, put in a lift, do what's necessary for most seniors' homes.

Besides that, this is not the problem seniors face. I can tell you that if you were to poll seniors across this province, of whom one in 10 of the women live in poverty and one in 20 men live in poverty, making home improvements is not the first issue that they face. The first issue they face is paying their rent, paying their mortgage, paying their heating, paying their property taxes and, actually, human health. The two issues that see seniors go into long-term care the most are: (1) the cost of living at home; and (2) human health—their health. They need help, and often it's help with minor duties. It's help shopping. It's help mowing the lawn. It's help cleaning their eavestroughs. This bill does not address either of those issues.

This bill, I would suggest, will not keep one senior in their home that otherwise would move into long-term care. Perhaps some wealthy seniors—the snowbirds, those who go down to Florida—can take advantage of the \$10,000, make home improvements, see that value in their houses, if they ever decide to sell. But for most seniors who have modest incomes or most seniors who live in poverty, this bill will not help them at all.

Now if the government had wanted to do this right, they could have looked to our sister province in Quebec,

where they actually get a gift. They get some money up front where they can actually make improvements. They don't have to come up with the money themselves, money that is in very short supply for the vast majority of seniors in our province.

The second point that I want to make is this one, though, and that's the very question of the bill itself. We presumably were brought back from summer break to this chamber to debate and pass—although, of course, we in the New Democratic Party have some problems with passing it—a bill to basically send teachers back to the classrooms—not that they were ever not going to go back to the classrooms—the so-called Putting Students First bill, which in fact puts Liberal government first. We were brought back to debate that bill. So the question has to be: Why are we debating this bill, a bill that has been on the order paper for at least a year? Why are we looking at home renovation in these precious weeks before school started instead of the bill that we were brought back to debate?

Not only that, but then they brought in a new motion, a motion, really, just designed to stick a needle in the eye of the loyal opposition over here to our right, saying how wonderful all-day kindergarten is. Again, that was a bill that was passed years ago. So why would the government bring in a motion that gets debated, that chews up precious time in this chamber—time, by the way, that's paid for by the taxpayer, I must say—debating a motion that simply says how wonderful it is that we already passed a bill a few years ago? Why would you do that? Why would you do that when presumably the only reason we're all sitting here today is to pass Bill 115? So why would you do that? And why would you do this home renovation act? Why would you bring this forward? Again, an extremely modest bill, a bill that really pays lip service to seniors rather than doing actually anything for them—a lip service bill and a lip service motion chewing up precious debate time when, presumably, there's such an urgent task at hand, such an urgent task that we have to be brought back in August to debate Bill 115?

So the question is this: What's the real purpose behind bringing forward this bill at this time? I would warn that the real purpose of bringing forward this bill at this time are two by-elections, one that's happening in Vaughan and one that's happening in Kitchener–Waterloo, and it is to position the government so that they look like they're getting tough. Who are they getting tough with? They're getting tough with teachers. Well, you know, this is amusing for a so-called education government—but so that they can get tough and so they can play to their right side, so they can appeal to Conservative voters.

We in the New Democratic Party have always said that there are some great similarities between Liberals and Conservatives. This of course highlights those incredible similarities that really they're on the same page when it comes to education. That page is cutbacks to the classrooms, cutbacks to what our students have enjoyed in previous generations and, of course, trying to win by-elections, because there's nothing that one can say about

this government if you don't say that it's self-serving. It's certainly self-serving.

0910

So this serves the Liberals' purpose. Bringing forward this bill, Bill 2, doesn't serve seniors; it does serve Liberals—they think. Again, I would warrant that on Thursday we'll find out if the ploy has worked. But until that day, here we are chewing up debate time talking about a bill that is not the bill we were presumably brought back to discuss, a bill that really is a no-brainer, a bill that does very little but pay lip service to the needs—huge needs—of seniors, many of whom live in poverty.

To get back to seniors and this home renovation tax credit, Madam Speaker, again, you have to put the money up front. You don't have the money if you're a senior; the average senior in my riding, anyway. They don't have the money to put up front. But if you do, you get a very, very modest little break on your taxes at the end of the year. This would not keep one of my seniors—in fact, I have not had one inquiry in our constituency office about how to access this. I should say that I think I had one, and when they found out what the bill actually includes, that went out the window. They said, "We don't have money to put up front to do anything. We're too busy paying our hydro costs and our property taxes. That's where our money is going." And by the way, they're struggling just to do that.

I said, when I was speaking about this bill before, that there's a whole new breed of seniors, a group of seniors who find it cheaper to get on a cruise ship and keep moving around the world than go into long-term care at the rate of thousands of dollars a month. That's how expensive long-term care is, and most seniors only get there by selling their house and spending the principal. We, the sandwich generation, know this full well, because we are in fact the ones who are stepping into the breach left by this government and looking after our seniors. If this bill is this Liberal government's answer to the plight of seniors, I would say, "Sorry, seniors. Wait. Wait another year or two until maybe something better comes along."

But what this bill and the tabling of this bill really is, is again a ploy to appeal to people in a by-election, in fact to filibuster their own bill, Bill 115, which is what we were supposed to be brought back here to debate. We're not debating that; we're debating this. We're not debating Bill 115. No, no, no. We're debating a motion about how wonderful all-day kindergarten is, which was already passed years ago.

The question before the House really should be, what is the true motive of this government? I think it doesn't take a long stretch; in fact, the media has certainly cottoned on to the true ploy here, and that true ploy is two by-elections, Vaughan and Kitchener–Waterloo. That's why this government has brought us back. That's why we're sitting. It's not to pass any bill; it's not to deal with educational matters. No, no, no, no. It's just so the government can posture in front of voters.

What I'd say just to conclude, Madam Speaker, is that the voters in Kitchener–Waterloo and the voters in

Vaughan know better than that. They know better than that. They see through it. Nobody buys it. Nobody buys this; certainly not the seniors who call our constituency offices looking for help. Nobody gets anything about this Liberal government except the one true thing, and that is they want a majority government, and they want a majority government at any cost. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. I appreciate the comments from the member from Parkdale–High Park. However—no surprise to anyone—I'm going to disagree about the intention of this bill and the fact of how important it is that we are debating this bill in this Legislature. I'm glad that the Legislature is back, because I like coming back to work and making sure that we continue to represent our communities, not only back in our ridings but also in the Legislature, and get to the important work that people have sent us to do. This is one of them.

In the last election, this issue was spoken of again and again, where seniors want to ensure that they continue to live in their homes, that they live with the independence and dignity that they so much deserve. They need tools. They need mechanisms and opportunities by which they can continue to live in their homes. The healthy homes renovation tax credit is one such tool among many to ensure that our seniors have the mechanisms to live in accessible homes—so that they can make changes to their homes.

I was just in my riding two weekends ago visiting neighbours door to door, and one senior, contrary to the member of Parkdale–High Park, spoke to me about this particular issue. That senior loves her home. She wants to continue to live in her home. She said, “Well, you talked about, during the last election, that there may be an opportunity for me to make changes to my home and get a tax credit for it. Where is it?” Well, I'm really happy to stand here today saying, we are debating this. We need to pass this legislation as quickly as possible so those seniors are able to make those changes to their homes, be it putting in ramps or elevators to their staircases or changing their bathrooms, making them more accessible so they can continue to live in their home. To the senior back in my riding of Ottawa Centre: We're working on it.

I am very excited and glad that this legislation is being debated, and I want to make sure that all members vote in support of this legislation so that we can pass this law and help our seniors at home.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to comment on the remarks by the member from Parkdale–High Park. I think it's important to put in some sort of context. This bill has been dragged and delayed for almost a year now, and if they can really manage this properly—it was first introduced in November 2011—obviously they still haven't got the job done.

But if you look at it, the bill is quite measured in terms of what seniors are able to apply for and how they can apply. If you look in the explanatory note, you'll see “reference to qualifying expenditures paid by or on behalf of an individual in a taxation year for listed improvements to a qualifying principal residence of the individual.” So it's another example of a really crafty red tape bill. Seniors that want to get up to a maximum of \$10,000, they'll have to qualify for certain expenditures that aren't eligible.

Now, what I've heard from my constituents is that they're trying to replace their furnace with a more energy-efficient furnace because energy bills are the highest they've ever been in the history of Ontario, and that's what they face every month, opening up that energy or the electricity bill and finding a shock that they can't get away from—they have to heat their home or air condition their home. This is what seniors, I think, really want: a practical approach to avoid the high costs as a result of the HST. All the expenditures that they make should be eligible, and I think that this bill and the red tape attached to it doesn't really give them the tools to make their home more comfortable. I think that's a problem.

We'll have to see. The bill has been to the economic affairs committee and it's been reported back to the House—an amended version of it. The amended version really still doesn't address the amount of red tape that seniors are facing to stay in their own homes. So I put that on the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for James Bay—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Timmins–James Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Timmins–James Bay; sorry.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: People just call me Gilles; don't worry about it.

I just want to say that I agree with the synopsis that was put forward by my colleague from Parkdale–High Park who says that this in itself is not a bad thing. Is it something that we should be voting against? Absolutely not. It's a step forward. Is it a big step? No. It's a small step. And seniors are looking, quite frankly, for relief in a whole bunch of other areas such as high electricity prices, rents etc.—and drug costs, that's the other big one. My God, the amount of phone calls we get in our constituency offices where seniors have to decide between: “Should I take a prescription and fill it or should I pay my rent, my phone or my hydro?” There's unfortunately far too many of those.

The other point that I think needs to be made, and she touched on it, is that this government seems to be filibustering its own bill. We're now on, what, day five of third reading on a bill that has the support of the House? I know the Conservatives are going to vote against it because that's just the way they are; they don't believe in—they do what they do. But certainly, New Democrats are supporting it. I would imagine the Liberals must be

supporting it because they're the ones who authored the bill. Here they are. They've been filibustering this bill.

The member set out on Thursday, I guess, when this debate first came back after third reading—I had gone to the government House leader to say, "We're done. We don't need to speak to this anymore." But immediately, the Liberals got up. Well, jeez, if the Liberals are going to get up to speak, we're not going to sit down and just watch the show. We're going to intervene.

I'd be interested to see to what degree the government is really serious about trying to make this minority Parliament work. I think they want a narrative, and that narrative that they're trying to create is: If we can show that nothing works in this place, well, then we can make another argument for the by-election. Again, it's about Liberals taking care of themselves and not taking care of seniors in this case. But we'll see. Maybe we'll scare the government by not putting somebody up, and we'll see how this continues.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to speak on the healthy homes renovation tax credit. You know, Speaker, this is a bill that we tabled back in November 2011, one of the first bills that we tabled after the election, because we'd made a very clear commitment to provide this tax credit for seniors so that they could stay in their homes. It's something that absolutely I hear about in my constituency office. You know, we talked about this for hours and hours and hours at second reading, and we couldn't get agreement to have a vote on it. This is something that should have been done by about March break in a reasonable world. But hey, we came back and it hadn't been passed yet; it was still sitting on the order paper for third reading. We're doing third reading. It's on the order paper for third reading.

I want to comment about what the bill actually says. It says that effective October 1, 2011—and I do have seniors saying, "I've got my tax receipts. When can I submit them?" It would allow people to get a \$1,500 maximum tax credit, a 15% tax credit. So you don't have to spend \$10,000; it's whatever the reno cost. So if the reno to help a senior stay in their home is grab bars around the tub and around the bathroom, that's not going to cost \$10,000. But for that smaller change—it can make a huge difference to get the grab bars—that senior can keep their receipts and they can still get a tax credit. So I think we do need to get this rolled out so seniors can take advantage of it. I'm looking forward to being able to tell my constituents it's ready to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all who weighed in on this.

I have to say that I've never, ever met a senior—and this is going back into my ministry days, when I visited long-term-care facilities and retirement homes a lot—who said that they were forced out of their homes

because they couldn't afford grab bars around their tub. I've never met that. Those who can afford to spend \$10,000 don't need our help up front.

So this is a very, very modest little bill. Do we support it? Sure, why not? Why is it taking up House time? One would have to ask the government side that. As I said, I weighed in on that. I suggested, as did the member for Timmins-James Bay, that it's taking up House time so that they can filibuster their own bill, Bill 115, so they can take a stand, get some news in K-W and Vaughan and perhaps win a majority. It's all about winning a majority; that's why we're here. It's not about seniors and it's not about students.

The member from Ottawa Centre I have deep regard for, and I listened intently to his comments. I don't know why he's sitting with his back against the wall. I think he should be in cabinet. I think he should be down in one of the front rows, and we all agree on that in this House. President of the Liberal Party, a lot of talent—put him in the cabinet. It's sad that he sits where he sits.

Just to wrap up, does this bill accomplish much? No. Does it accomplish a tiny little bit? Yes. Do we support it? Sure, why not? Should we be doing something far, far greater and far more in depth to help seniors, many of whom live in poverty? Absolutely. Those are the seniors we're hearing from, and those seniors have deep needs that this government is certainly not addressing.

So, again, let's get on with it. We were brought back, I assume, for Bill 115, not for this bill or the motion on the bill that already passed. Let's get to it, government. Let's actually give the taxpayers their money's worth. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Go get 'em, Bob.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Rosario. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 2.

While some seniors will appreciate this option, the bill, in our opinion, only benefits a tiny segment of this population. Wealthier seniors will do renovations regardless. Poorer seniors will no more readily be able to pay that \$8,500 portion of the \$10,000 bill than they would have been before. This bill therefore only helps that very small group between rich and poor. They will be that subgroup benefiting from this bill. Additionally, [inaudible] further inside that group to address accessibility or functionality concerns.

Given the estimated cost, the government would have done far better to help all families and stimulate the economy by providing a pan-Ontario benefit such as, for example, the removal of the HST from electricity and/or heating fuel.

The government also has not provided any detail on how this program is funded, so we are only guessing as to whether this is increased or alternative spending. If we are facing a \$16-billion deficit and funds are so-called unspent allocations, this will add to the deficit. If the government really wanted to help seniors and has \$60

million in short-term money available, there are other ways to assist: for example, long-term-care beds and more home care for seniors.

This is only a window dressing bill for the Liberals which, along with the tuition reduction for post-secondary students, betrays a continued initiative to pick and choose small segments of society for political reasons.

Madam Speaker, this bill is one that is very important to all of us in all of our constituencies, where we have an ongoing aging population and many baby boomers approaching the age of senior status, myself included. The time it took for this government to finally table something that would try to help seniors is ridiculous. Even so, in committee, the government showed little to no co-operation with suggestions that were put forward by the Ontario PC Party. NDP amendments that we now see in this bill are uncoded but will surely balloon the total cost of this program to unaffordable levels.

When we PC members had asked for the cost of this program, the government was only able to answer in global terms and rhetoric. Never was the actual or projected total cost outlined in committee or outlined before this chamber.

Seniors will do renovations regardless of if this program is in place or not. Poorer seniors, those who really need help, will no sooner be able to pay the \$8,500 portion of the \$10,000 amount under this bill than they would have been before.

This government has not outlined where the money for this program will come from. I have asked before and I will ask again on behalf of my colleagues, is the McGuinty government doing what it should to help Ontarians get those good, well-paying jobs they need so that they can help their families? Is the McGuinty government acting fiscally responsible and helping to stimulate the economy? Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the answer to both those questions is no.

This bill says it aims to help seniors. It fails. This bill aims to help persons with disabilities. Again, it fails. This bill aims to stimulate the economy. Again, on the third count, it fails miserably. The only thing that makes this bill something positive is the spin that the government has placed on its title, the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: They're good at that.

Mr. Robert Bailey: They're very good at spin, as my colleague from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex says—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: —the member for Trinity—Spadina says as well.

If anything, this bill puts seniors at greater risk of losing their homes and their independence. In order to qualify for this credit, \$10,000 minimum must be spent on renovations. The average Ontario senior's income is somewhere between \$25,000 for an individual, Madam Speaker, or \$45,000 a couple. Most seniors living off their savings or dependent on their families for some financial support cannot afford to take part in this program because, as you know, we are facing at this time

some of the highest unemployment in recent history. Our numbers are over 7.5%, with no hope of that number dipping below 7% until at least 2015, if we're lucky.

Again, let me remind this House that we are staring directly in the face of a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt, according to Don Drummond, if we don't take action. We have over 600,000 men and women out of work, a serious jobs and spending crisis right here in this province of Ontario. There are billion-dollar scandals, which have been in the media lately, like Ornge, eHealth and many others.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Power plants.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Power plants, as the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex says.

This government is so desperate to change the channel to make Ontario voters forget about the poor leadership and mismanagement coming from this Liberal government here in Ontario, Toronto, that they are trying to do that with Bill 2—back to the bill, before I get pulled up by someone.

0930

There is no need for this province, once the shining light of Confederation, to be faced with this \$30-billion deficit. There's no reason that Ontario should be condemned to a continuing, stagnant economic growth regime.

On our side of the House, the path we're on simply isn't good enough. So I'll continue, along with my colleagues beside me and in the rest of the chamber, to promote our plan, the Ontario PC plan, to finally reduce the cost and size of government, to build and grow our economy with new jobs that will ensure that Ontario will lead again. This is our number one priority, and it is the primary issue that we must address. Until the debt and spending are under control and jobs are returned once again to Ontario, the PC caucus cannot support any additional spending without offsets.

We owe this, at the very least, to the people of Ontario. We owe this to Ontario businesses, both small and medium, and large employers across this province. We owe this to all of those who chose to make Ontario home, as well as those born and raised here. They've invested their lives in this great province and they know, like we do in the PC caucus, what Ontario is capable of being, capable of actually becoming great again.

In order to have the kind of social policy that we want and that the people of Ontario want, we have to make sure that we have the financial resources that are required to support our social services and provide the kind of government that Ontario families, including seniors, are asking for. This Liberal government is once again placing the cart before the horse, just as they always do—speaking of horses, it's not a good year to be a horse in Ontario.

Speaking about great governments of the past, I do proudly stand up with the PC government—the former government. Let's not forget that former governments by the PCs created over a million jobs in the province of Ontario; they created the environment for those million jobs to be created. Today, under this government, we're

faced with over 600,000 people unemployed. I'll tell you, the members on the opposite side of the House should sit up and take notice of what is actually going on in this province.

The people of Sarnia-Lambton have told me that they're not very interested in this bill. I've had no people call my office—as one of our colleagues here from the NDP bench said as well—no constituents of mine call and ask that this bill be expedited; they're not even calling to ask how to implement it. I get calls on the cost of energy, the cost of keeping seniors in their home, home care, health care, access to health care, issues with emergency room visits—there are lots of issues in this province.

How many Ontario men and women, let alone seniors, do you know who could put up half their annual income for a home renovation, as they live on less than \$25,000 for a single and up to \$40,000 for a couple? Not very many, I would think. The number of people this program would apply to drops significantly based on marital status. As if that weren't enough, seniors receiving ODSP benefits are excluded from qualifying for the tax credit. That would restrict people even further who would benefit.

Then, your renovations have to meet specific criteria—we haven't even gone there yet—which means that those who could afford to renovate their homes are an even smaller fraction of those who would get the actual refund. You see what is happening here: Slowly, more and more people are being excluded from each requirement—

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's all spin.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's like a Maytag washing machine—it's all spin.

Do you see what is happening? Slowly, more and more people are being excluded with each requirement. People who could afford the \$10,000 to renovate their home don't have to wait for a government cheque or a tax credit or some inspector to tell them that they qualify; they would do the renovation in any event. That's what you do when you've got the extra money. Meanwhile, those who need the help, who cannot afford the renovations and who don't have that cash to do what they need, are still left sitting in the dust.

This bill, at the end of the day, like most pieces of Liberal fluff legislation since I came to the House in 2007, is just nothing but a mean joke because it offers little hope and then proceeds to deny the majority of people the help that it promises to provide.

I believe that it is essential to manage your finances in a responsible way so that, in return, you can help others. This is no different than a government structure. If the government cannot manage their own finances and ensure that all their bank accounts are in order, then they can certainly not pursue additional spending such as this tax credit.

Madam Speaker, let me reiterate again: I know that time and time again as we talk about this, it's critical that all members, especially members on the government side

of the House, who may be blinded by their own talking points, remind themselves when they look in the mirror that their government is essentially bankrupting the province of Ontario. We have a jobs and debt crisis that need to be taken very seriously. We're talking about future generations of Ontarians who are going to be paying for the last nine years of total fiscal mismanagement.

Bill 2 is purely political. The bill is aimed at tugging at the hearts of the people of Ontario in the hopes of distracting Ontarians from the fiscal reality that this province is facing. This bill is meant to keep the government benches busy, keep the members from falling asleep in some cases—which is easy to do in this place. It really won't do anything to change the course we're on and the road that Premier McGuinty has led us on.

If you're a senior on ODSP, the benefits of Bill 2 are negated in part because of these other programs. Bill 2 states that you must obtain the age of 65 by the end of 2012. I'm a few years away from qualifying for that, but if I were and I wanted to do—thank God, I'm a few years away from that yet.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: You're 23 years away.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, a good 20 years yet.

But if I did want to qualify for that \$10,000 in renovations, I would be able to put \$1,500 in my pocket because I can afford the \$10,000. This bill does not help those who actually need assistance.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: No; that's all right. There are solutions to mitigate any abuse of this program or system—broad-based tax relief. The finance minister, since becoming finance minister, has increased spending by almost \$21 billion and has never balanced a single budget. This year's budget illustrated an additional \$2 billion in spending. Where is this money to pay for this program coming from? Where does the government think that they will get the money to pay for these proposed amendments by the NDP?

The Ontario PC Party simply cannot support a bill—and I can't—that has not been fully costed year over year, nor can we support a bill that mitigates an entire segment of the population. This is the same inaction that I have come to expect from this government.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're all about tax cuts, aren't you?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Certain tax cuts.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, only certain tax cuts.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. They've got to be targeted.

This band-aid solution is only covering up the larger wound to Ontario that Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government have inflicted. Ontario is sitting with a looming \$16-billion deficit and over \$400 billion in debt if something is not done. That's according to the government's own hand-picked study by Don Drummond.

To add insult to injury, this government introduces Bill 2, and today we're at third reading. It is hanging a carrot in front of Ontario seniors, hoping to lead them to the trough.

Seniors are one of the most vulnerable segments in our population. We cannot allow for a government to knowingly take advantage of them under the auspices of fiscal relief. This entire House knows that a tax credit as is presented with the healthy homes tax credit is nothing more than lip service. If you want to invest in Ontario seniors, then provide an incentive that will actually stimulate the economy, bring financial security to the seniors, and not do it on the backs of hard-working Ontarians.

This Liberal government has argued that this legislation is all about protecting the economy and helping the trades as well. I would disagree with that. The bill is not really about seniors and it's not really about helping the trades; what it's really about is Liberal politics. We find it strange on this side, given the economic state of Ontario, that we are debating legislation that is in favour, at the end of the day, of more spending. It does not make any logical sense, but for some reason this government seems to think increasing spending is something that they should continue to do.

Of course, we've been on the record—and I have, many times, as have many of my colleagues—that overspending by this government is taking Ontario down the path of an eventually \$411-billion debt.

We should be debating a plan that would put those 600,000 men and women who are unemployed in this province back to work. This government should be introducing a plan to address that \$16-billion deficit and a plan to deal with this massive debt that we currently have in Ontario, and a plan to get our economy growing and back on its feet again. Yet here we are debating this bill that is completely ignoring the economic crisis that Ontario is facing.

0940

There's a good magazine that comes out every month called the Fraser Forum. They had a good article a couple of months ago called "Ontario's Budget 2012: A Missed Opportunity," in which they highlighted the opportunities that this government, led by Finance Minister Duncan, could have taken to alleviate some of the heartache and overspending in this province. "In March, Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan had one of those rare opportunities of which politicians can only dream. With his province heading towards a fiscal crisis caused by out-of-control spending and mounting debt, an opposition sympathetic to the need to deal with the problem, a public that expects his government to tackle the deficit ... and a media that" finally "understands the need for significant fiscal restraint, the stars were perfectly aligned" for Dwight Duncan.

"Call it his 'Paul Martin' opportunity. Unfortunately, unlike Martin ... Duncan didn't seize the opportunity."

It's proof of what we've been saying all along, since the days back in March when that budget was delivered: that the will of this government just isn't strong enough to deal with the fiscal crisis and the jobs crisis that we find ourselves in.

At this time, I will wind up my remarks this morning. I thank the House and you, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence and look forward to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to congratulate my friend from Sarnia-Lambton. It was a very fiery speech and it got under the skin of many Liberals, I could tell. I agree with some of the comments that he made; I disagree with a lot within it as well.

But there's no point in talking about what he said, about things I might disagree with. I just want to talk, for the two minutes I've got, against this bill, because it's a picayune bill that will support some seniors, the one-percenters who have got a whole lot of money. But a whole lot of Liberals know that a lot of seniors in this society don't have a lot of money. In fact, we are in an unprecedented history where many of our seniors are poor and are being impoverished every year, each and every year. And rather than coming up with a program that actually supports seniors, we come up with this little program, the healthy homes renovation tax credit, and they say, "Oh, seniors I talk to are looking forward to getting 15% back of the \$1,000 they spend on renovations in their home." Please. Who's calling you? Tell me who is actually calling you, because I don't believe anybody's calling you—

Interjection: N-o-o-body.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The "n-o-o-body" fits very well—other than the one-percenters who call you saying, "Bring it on, because I need the 15% tax break." I don't think the people who earn \$15,000 a year from their Canada pension plan, assuming they have their full pension, and those who have the old age security, which is up to \$5,500—those people don't have money to spend in their homes. Most of those people don't own homes, in fact. They're tenants who are looking for affordable rental housing. That's what you're not getting.

Maybe I'll have 20 minutes to speak. We'll see.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. I'm just thrilled to be speaking to this bill again this week. It's a new week, a new school year. I am thrilled; I'm absolutely thrilled.

This bill has been in the works for a long time—far too long. It's time to move this bill forward. It was last fall when the Premier announced that this bill, if passed, would be retroactive—retroactive, Speaker—to October 2011. Seniors have been saving up their receipts for some time now. There's momentum on this bill. We need to continue on it, and it absolutely will benefit many seniors, contrary to the negative criticism and cynicism from members opposite in both parties. It's a good-news bill that will benefit approximately 380,000 seniors. That's fantastic.

Our population's getting older; we're all getting older. We want to help seniors who want to stay in their home

for as long as possible. For those seniors who can't stay in their home, we'll continue to support long-term care, of course. But many seniors I know in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East and elsewhere want to stay at home, and this bill will help them do that.

The other beauty of this bill is that for those who have a senior living in their home, they can claim this credit.

Seniors don't have to spend \$10,000 to receive a credit; that's a maximum. Many modifications to a home are much cheaper than that, and the seniors will be able to receive a tax credit. It's a wonderful bill that allows people to stay at home, and more and more, people are looking at homes that are accessible for the future.

Is this our whole strategy about seniors? No. I spoke for 20 minutes, at length, last week about all of our strategies about aging and looking after seniors. It's part of a bigger puzzle. I think it would be a shame if the other parties didn't support us on this, and I look forward to voting—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Good morning, Speaker. Welcome, everyone. A special greeting to all of the MPPs who couldn't see their young children off to school today because we're working. I want to give a special mention to all those parents.

I want to commend the member for Sarnia-Lambton for his speech. You know, when you're here in the morning, you do a bit of Eastwooding, because there are a number of empty chairs; you don't get the full depth of audience when you speak here at the 9 o'clock rotation. But I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to provide a couple of minutes of comments on the record for my good friend the member for Sarnia-Lambton, Bob Bailey. I had the pleasure of sitting beside Mr. Bailey—we sat up in the penthouse just behind me when I first got here a couple of years ago. I know he's a very honourable member. He really cares about his community. He's an active member, and one thing that you can say about Bob Bailey is that he makes sure he talks to his constituents.

I know when he spoke this morning about the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, Bill 2, that he spoke from his heart, knowing that his constituents aren't well served with this. We've talked about this before. I spoke at second reading, spoke about a number of people in my riding. I know that over the third reading debate there has been some mention about grab bars and other things that people can spend—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Grappa?

Mr. Steve Clark: Grab bars, you know, on your shower.

We did a little research. To put in one of them, I think it costs \$50. So this actual bill would only give a tax credit back on a \$50 renovation of \$7.50. That's ridiculous. Right now in this province we're having seniors in their homes that can't even get a home visit for a bath, so this is ridiculous, what we're—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I agree with part of what the member says. There are other issues that would be far more useful for seniors, such as affording to be able to buy one's prescription drugs, for example, being able to pay one's hydro bill, other things like that. This is not a bad measure, and for that reason we're going to support it. It's a tax credit for those who can afford and who want to do renovations.

What I do take exception to, though, is the Conservative line, and it sounds good, like when they say, "We don't want to do anything unless it's costed out," right? But they're the guys proposing all kinds of tax cuts that, quite frankly, have created most of this problem.

There was an article that showed up in the paper last week sometime that said the amount of tax cuts that were provided by the Conservatives and the Liberals over the last number of years equals \$15 billion. Look at that. It just happens to be the size of our deficit.

The opposition in the Conservative caucus says, "The only way to prosperity is through austerity. The only way you can build a strong economy is through austerity."

Applause.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And listen to them: They're applauding. They're so excited they are falling off their chairs.

But there is another way, and that's what Andrea Horwath and New Democrats have been saying and will continue to say; that is, you grow your economy. You don't do it by austerity only. Yes, you have to be making sure that you balance the budget and that you're frugal in the way that you spend the money that you get from taxes, but you need to be able to grow an economy. You do that by doing things that assist the economy; for example, saying, "What are we going to do in order to assist employers to have the people that they need trained, skilled up, in order to take advantage of whatever opportunities exist there?" Only give tax cuts to those that are prepared to reinvest back in Ontario, such as the proposal that has been put forward.

I think that when I listen to Conservatives, I hear the Tea Party; I hear Mitt Romney all over again. It's the same old tired solutions that don't work and, quite frankly, will be rejected—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for York West.

0950

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'd like to add some comments on this particular bill in response to the member from Leeds-Grenville.

Even if I have one senior—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm very sorry; I must apologize. It's back to Mr. Bailey to respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I didn't realize it was back to me already.

I'd like to thank the members from Trinity-Spadina, Pickering-Scarborough East, Leeds-Grenville—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are you going to thank me?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes—Timmins—James Bay and York West; the member got a shortened, truncated, thanks there, but thank you anyway. I wanted to say the elephant bill was truncated but I better not get into that—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You and I should never talk about elephants.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, they never forget. There's an elephant in the room.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity this morning. I think I made those points. I'm not going to go back over them again. Our concern was that this bill is limited to the number of seniors who would be able to take advantage of it. I could see that, like I say, at my constituency office, the people that present there are concerned about—it's either about accessibility to health care in their home or there are questions about their energy bills and skyrocketing energy prices, and they're concerned about paying those bills. I've had no one come—maybe this will change after today, after this debate. I'm sure there are a number of people back in Sarnia—Lambton riveted to the TV watching this debate. One of my colleagues said that it would be more exciting to watch one of those Michael Holmes homes renovation videos than watching this debate today on the healthy homes tax credit, but I'll leave that to others to decide—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mike likes this. He's in favour.

Mr. Robert Bailey: He likes this? I'll have to talk to him when I get a chance.

Anyway, like I say, we're concerned about this, and the PC caucus, at the end of the day, won't be supporting this. We're looking for real action for seniors and for all people in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker; nice to see you this morning.

I look forward to the opportunity to talk about why we're really here. Certainly in my riding of Nipissing, I have, like the member from Sarnia—Lambton has suggested, not heard from one constituent about this so-called tax credit. What I'm really hearing about at home is the concern from seniors about their hydro bill.

Under this government, as of May 3 this year, we've officially seen our hydro bills double. Back when this government was first elected, hydro was 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour; today, that rate has gone to 8.8 cents—on May 3, in Toronto, Ontario, when they opened their hydro bills, they saw 8.8 cents a kilowatt hour from 4.3 cents. That's what seniors are concerned about today: How are they going to be able to pay that hydro bill?

It used to be your Visa bill—or your credit card bill—when it came in was the one you were afraid to open. But can you imagine that today it's your hydro bill that sits on the table unopened, because seniors are afraid to open it? Let me tell you that businesses are afraid to open their hydro bills as well. There's something I'm going to talk about this morning. I'm going to try to use some of the time to explain “global adjustment.” These are two words put together that are new to businesses' hydro bills, so

we're going to get into that a little bit later—why businesses today are afraid to open their hydro bills as well.

Now I visited a business in North Bay on Friday, toured the plant and then sat down with the owner and his son. I said, “Bring me your hydro bills. I want to have a look.” And they said, “You know, Vic, we're very concerned.” The reason I was there was to talk about high hydro rates. We opened their bills. They had a spreadsheet done of the last year, and it was astounding to see “global adjustment,” these two words that meant nothing to anybody two years ago. It wasn't even on your hydro bill a couple of years ago. It used to be called “provincial benefit.” What that meant was, it was a rebate every month on your hydro bill; it was money back to you. This government has gone through that and converted that provincial benefit—because it's no longer a benefit. They've now called it “global adjustment.” It's an adjustment, all right, but I can tell you it's an adjustment upwards.

So this one company—Central Welding is the name of the company in North Bay. We looked at their hydro bills, and I was able to point out why their bills have doubled in the last eight years. I showed them the line of “global adjustment.” The global adjustment—which is to pay for the Green Energy Act, conservation and a few other things—now is higher than their electricity consumption, but there's no rhyme or reason to global adjustment.

I have been an elected member for 11 months, and I'm lucky to be in the position as Ontario's energy critic, so I have spent a tremendous amount of time looking into this energy sector. There aren't five people who will agree on how global adjustment is developed. Nonetheless, there would be universally no one who can agree that it's something that we're happy with. It is about to bankrupt the business community of Ontario. There's just no question. I'm going to give you some examples as we talk.

But here I am at Central Welding, and I'm looking at what their hydro bill was. Their hydro bill is at one level; their global adjustment is considerably higher, sometimes two times higher. In other months, their hydro may have been lower, but their global adjustment is even higher. It makes no rhyme and no reason whatsoever.

Speaker, let's look at how all this began: with the introduction in 2009 of the Green Energy Act. It may have a noble name—“Green Energy Act”—but let me tell you, there is absolutely nothing further from being accurate and nothing green about the Green Energy Act. In fact, I will tell you, as in my examples, that what has happened is wind power has merely replaced water power in Ontario—one green for another green. Wind power today accounts for 3% of the energy we use in Ontario or that we create in Ontario. Water power has dropped from 25% of our power source to 22%. We've added 3%; we've taken 3%.

We've swapped one green for another, which happened to have been the green energy water power that Ontario was built on. Over 100 years, those water turbines have been spinning out clean, green, affordable, re-

newable energy to Ontario. We've taken some of that away and added unbelievably expensive wind turbine power, and are bankrupting Ontario to boot. One green up, one green down; tell me, Speaker, what can be green about that?

So again, we look back to 2009. I know I sat in the mayor's chair in the city of North Bay at the time, opened the package from the clerk, and it was this Green Energy Act. I started to read about it. It had an admirable name, I must admit. It had a very admirable name. There were some very appealing rates that no mayor could resist, obviously. Here we are with this plan to force so-called green energy in Ontario, and it's done in a couple of ways—three or four things that they did. Number one, they began by paying one of the highest subsidies for wind and solar in the world—not just in the country, not just North America, but in the world—which was designed to help attract many people here for this rich subsidy. Number two, they guaranteed that they would buy power from you whenever it could be made.

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Sadly, had they done any research in advance—as the Auditor General told us last November, there was no business plan put together for this, no knowledge of it, no plan to tell you what the ill effects will be: the ill effects on health, the ill effects on the economy, the ill effects to the business community, the ill effects to families who are budgeting, the ill effects to the seniors who can no longer afford to pay their hydro bill. None of that was gamed out. The Auditor General told us that. In fact, sadly, the Liberals' own cabinet was not aware of the Green Energy Act until it was designed and developed and implemented. The Auditor General has told us that, and I have every faith in the Auditor General's announcement.

In fact, I'm really quite looking forward to the Auditor General's report this coming November, because he has been incredibly critical of the Green Energy Act, and rightly so. Nothing has improved in the last year; only more damning evidence has come. So we look forward to that Auditor General's—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Point of order, Madam Speaker: I'm just trying to understand about the renovation tax credit, and—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I would just ask the member to make sure that his comments are indeed in keeping with Bill 2.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. As I mentioned only a few seconds ago, had they been listening, I talked about the fact that this is the number one issue with seniors. This is the issue, not this red herring that the Liberal Party has proffered to us over this election period in Kitchener, meant to distract us from talking about the number one issue with seniors. It truly is the number one issue with seniors.

The tax credit, which would be only for a few and only if they provide the \$10,000 up front to get a few dollars as a tax credit—this is not what is important to seniors. What is important in all of the town halls I've

been to—and I've been to a tremendous number of them this summer, as you know. The schedule in this energy critic role has been very gruelling, meeting with seniors over and over and over. All they want to talk about is high energy prices. They can't focus on anything else. They can't afford—they're afraid to open their hydro bills, Speaker.

Let me just continue talking about why we got into that and how it affects the seniors, which, sadly, has left them no options to utilize this program, or any other program, for that matter, when they don't have any other money in their pockets.

Here we've got, as I mentioned, a program that is the richest in the world, a program that guarantees to buy so-called green energy whenever and wherever it is made, regardless, obviously, of whether there's transmission capacity. We're now learning the tales of that in the microFIT program that's being allowed to be repurchased back by OPA. We now understand as well the math behind the trouble with the Green Energy Act. By overpaying on these rich programs—we have found that wind generally is made at night. The problem with wind when it's made at night is we don't need the wind when it's made at night. Predominantly, our use of wind is during the day. So we allow this wind power that's made at night to be captured. We pay for it—we richly pay for it. We find ourselves with a huge surplus of energy almost every night. During the day, we have a capacity to make 1,700 megawatts of wind power, but if you look at the IESO's report last week, the week before, there were days when we made nine megawatts of power at noon from wind. We pay for 1,700 megawatts of wind. We have that capacity, yet we're generating nine megawatts of wind. We've paid billions of dollars—billions of dollars—in this so-called Green Energy Act to make nine megawatts of wind. It's no wonder seniors can't afford to pay for their bills. We're paying all that money out for such little end-of-use capacity. At night, when the wind blows, we make more power. We don't need it. We end up paying the States, paying Quebec, to take that power from us.

Now, here's where the problem for our seniors comes from—let me get to the root of why the seniors are afraid to open their hydro bills: We are paying the States and we are paying Quebec to take our surplus power, power we didn't need to have made. We have it made by wind. We pay Quebec. We pay the States. The Auditor General, again, in his report last November, told us in the first 10 months of last year, we paid \$420 million to the States and to Quebec to take that power. That money has to come from somewhere, so that ends up in your global adjustment. Put that "one" in the column, which has now ended up on seniors' bills, families' bills and businesses' bills. It's not identified on the senior's bill, but it is on the business bill; it's broken out. There's a line there that says "global adjustment;" on your family bill and your senior's bill that they're afraid to open, it's all built in together. They don't differentiate it.

We continue to make this power that we don't need, and as a result, we allow water power to flow over Niag-

ara Falls, and we don't capture it. We allow the generators to stay idle, those generators we paid for 100 years ago. In fact, there were many of us that toured DeCew number 1—and it's called number 1—

Mr. Todd Smith: I was there.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The member from Prince Edward-Hastings was with us that day. We toured DeCew number 1: the first water power plant made in Ontario. In fact, we both saw the generator that is there, still operating—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Point of order, Madam Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I don't know what hydro generators have to do with the healthy homes tax credit. Perhaps we could hear some debate on the bill that's on the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to return to the healthy homes tax credit.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'll continue talking about how seniors cannot afford this red herring, so-called healthy homes tax credit, Speaker. They are broke. They're struggling to pay their hydro bills month after month. They're afraid to open their hydro bill this month, because under this government we've seen hydro rates rise from 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour to 8.8 cents.

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: And I realize the truth hurts, but I would look forward to the opportunity to continue to talk about what really is affecting seniors and why they are having no take-up on this opportunity that they're presenting, because they cannot afford to get into that.

When the member from Prince Edward-Hastings and I toured DeCew number 1—it was built in 1898; it's still operating. My point is that it's paid for. It has long been paid for. In fact, the generator was hand-wound by Nikola Tesla himself and it still is operating today. That is how we used to have clean, green, affordable, reliable, renewable energy—

Mr. Todd Smith: Now we're wasting it.

Mr. Victor Fedeli:—and now we're wasting billions of dollars on wind turbines that are costing us billions, when the federal government has said there are health issues. We're asking for a moratorium on that.

We've learned that water that we spill over Niagara Falls cost us \$300 million in lost resources last year alone. Add that to the global adjustment ticket. Somebody has got to pay for that waste. And then when we really make more power than we need, we abruptly shut down our nuclear plants. Now, Speaker, we did that four times last July. They are not designed to be shut down like that. This is how money adds up that costs our seniors and our families. It comes on their bills, because for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. It was not thought out when that bill was passed, and so you have abruptly shut down nuclear plants. When those are shut down—they're like a rocket launch sequence—they take days to ramp back up again. In the meantime, to

replace that, we have to fire up gas plants to replace that power while the nuclear group is reorganizing to re-launch that. So, Speaker, we're spilling water, venting steam and draining jobs. That's what this has come to in the province of Ontario.

Up in Timmins, Speaker, Xstrata Copper—this will be the final wrap-up of why this makes no sense and how it has hurt our seniors and people who used to work in Ontario. We pay Quebec to take that surplus power. Quebec then knocks at the door of Xstrata Copper in Timmins and says, "Look, we've got all this cheap power that we were paid for to take from you guys. We have all this cheap power. Why don't you leave Ontario, move over, just over the border into Quebec and reopen," and Xstrata Copper, tempted by half-price energy, said yes. Speaker, they dropped 670 employees in Timmins, a community of 45,000 men and women—670 are gone. They've now moved into the province of Quebec and reopened work at the smelter there for cheap energy. This is what's causing the draining of jobs in Ontario. This is why your seniors cannot afford to pay their hydro bill.

This government has mismanaged the economy. Today we have 600,000 unemployed in Ontario, 300,000 fewer people working in the manufacturing sector, just what the Auditor General told us. For every job created in the so-called green energy sector, we lose two to four jobs in other manufacturing sectors. If Xstrata Copper in Timmins isn't the poster child for that expression from the Auditor General, I don't know what better example there is: 670 are lost for cheap power just across the border, we have seniors who can't open their bill, and here we are, called back to talk about something to distract us from the election in Kitchener, when we should be talking about energy and why seniors cannot afford to pay their energy bills today, never mind having any money to look at this home tax credit. They don't have the \$10,000 to put into it. They don't have the money to pay their hydro bill every month.

So, Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to open up the discussion on what seniors really want to talk about.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests? The member from Pickering-Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Speaker. Welcome back. Great to see you in the chair.

It is my privilege to introduce some students from the University of Waterloo co-op program, here in the members' gallery to my right: Renée Sambrook and Matt Botelho. If you guys could stand up. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to your first assignment.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Premier, with a lot of sound and fury, you announced that we'd have an emergency session of the Legislature. It came in like some kind of legislative lion but quickly transformed into a lame duck session. You had a partial wage freeze, one of 4,000. It was like a wage freeze on training wheels, but no true action.

Premier, if we really want to get at the root of the problem, to actually reduce the size and cost of government, why don't we use this additional session, instead of spinning our wheels, to do the right thing and bring in an across-the-board wage freeze for all of us—doctors, teachers, MPPs, OPSEU workers? It's fair; it's reasonable; it will save us \$2 billion a year. Let's just get on with it. Take some action, Premier, and bring in a wage freeze for all of us.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question by my honourable colleague, and I understand the position he's putting forward. I say again I can't agree with him.

I appreciate the support they're providing with respect to our Putting Students First legislation. I think it's doing exactly what we need to do. It's going to address the automatic pay hike that otherwise would have occurred, it's going to hit the pause button on teacher pay, and it's going to ensure that we have stability in our schools, which is exactly what families want.

But with respect to the other request being made by my honourable colleague on an ongoing basis, we can't do that, because it would be subject to attacks in the courts, which I think would be justifiable. There is an element of process here that we have to respect. We're doing that with this particular legislation that is before the House at present, and we'll find a way to do it with respect to other public sector employees going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The unfortunate reality is that there has been a transparent phoniness to this legislative session. It was supposed to be a time to actually get serious about the debt crisis, and we saw maybe baby steps. With due apologies to Winston Churchill, never have so many come running from so far, so fast, for so little.

Let me try one more, Premier, and that's the end of these bankable sick days in the province, a benefit that has no grounding in the reality of families who are struggling to pay the bills. Isn't it time to end this practice where, for example, firefighters can cash in sick days they've not used, to the tune of \$50,000, like poker chips at a casino? Premier, if you want to be serious about the fiscal situation, why don't you end this practice across the board for all of us in the broader public sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are addressing it through our Putting Students First legislation. We think, as an employer, it is a practice that we can no longer afford. It is something that was already stopped with respect to the

Ontario Provincial Police. Insofar as municipal employees are concerned, I'll leave that to municipal employers to use their own judgment and make their own call in that regard. My honourable colleague may want to reach into municipalities and introduce some of his thinking there, but I think that would be unfortunate. I have faith in the abiding wisdom of our duly elected municipal representatives. We will deal with our employees, and I'll let others deal with their employees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, I don't know if the Premier's arguments are simply superficial or just slippery. On one hand, the Premier says that it's constitutional to do a wage freeze for teachers, but he says it's not constitutional to do it for anybody else. The Premier now is arguing that he would end bankable sick days for teachers, but he won't end bankable sick days for others, like firefighters.

Premier, you know this full well. You actually reached into school boards; through legislation and subsequent regulation, you're going to end that in school boards. So you did move into the school board arena. Municipalities have the exact same relationship with the province as do school boards, so I don't understand your reasoning, Premier. Why is it good for teachers but not good for firefighters? Ours is fair and reasonable: Eliminate bankable sick days across the board and save taxpayers money.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, that's characteristic of the approach that was brought by my honourable colleague when he sat in cabinet during the PC government years. They downloaded new responsibilities on to municipalities, responsibilities that our municipalities could not afford. We've been working for the last nine years to take back those responsibilities, where they properly belong, and to accord a modicum of respect to our municipal partners.

I understand that's their particular approach. They have all the answers to all the world's greatest problems, Speaker. We don't pretend to do that, but we understand something: that we are at our best when we work together and particularly when we respect our municipal partners.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier, Speaker: I do regret the transparent phoniness of the Premier's message. A man who for nine years opened the floodgates to spending is now saying he's going to turn off the spigot. Nobody believes it, Speaker. With a wink and a nod, he's going to increase spending if it's a majority government. We all know that. People see through it, and increased taxes would pay for it.

Let me try a different tack, since the Premier shoots down any of the ideas we bring forward to rein in spending on a reasonable basis. Premier, you brought forward, in your budget bill in 2010, a massive loophole

to allow bureaucrats to get bonus pay increases. We saw as a result that 98% of senior bureaucrats got merit pay increases, some up to 14%—

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: What the Premier has not answered, despite the fact I've asked this question multiple times—Premier, please tell me again, why did you specifically put that loophole in your budget bill in 2010?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as we indicated, we are going to change the policy that was established by the Harris government, the government that he was part of. The total amount available to employees in the public sector with respect to this pay-for-performance is actually where it was in 2003. But we do concur that it's important that all people in the public and broader public sector share in this. We'll be bringing forward appropriate changes to deal with that. I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues found out about this after it was reported in the papers. We're working hard at it. We'll get it right, and we will have a complete freeze.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I still have not heard the rationale from the Premier as to why they created that loophole. We did point it out back in 2010. We said there was no justification for it. They maintained that loophole, and we saw the result, cause and effect—a 98% increase to senior bureaucrats. It's like they got their hand caught in the cookie jar and now they're trying to blame the cookie. We know who was behind that from the beginning, Speaker.

If you can't justify why you created it, maybe you can justify why you're not going to close it. I can't figure out your logic. It was the wrong thing to do. We objected at the time; we object now. We're clear; we're consistent. Will you do the right thing? End these merit pay increases as part of an across-the-board wage freeze for all of us. It will save us \$2 billion a year.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, during the budget process, we asked for their views on these matters. Did they respond? No. They rang the bells, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection: They walked away.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They walked away, absent without leadership.

Mr. Speaker, we are implementing a full wage freeze across the public and broader public sectors that will, in effect, cover pay-for-performance as well for non-bargained employees. We want to make sure we get this right. I'll be bringing forward the appropriate changes over the course of the next number of weeks, and that will result in a freeze on pay-for-performance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

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Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, the Premier's finance minister reminds me of that character in *Casablanca* who found himself suddenly caught in the casino

and wondered where all the gambling was taking place. It's like they walked into their office right after election day and said, "Holy smokes. Who spent all this money?" Nine years of runaway spending, and they want to go back on that path. We can't afford it.

If you're actually serious about this session, if you actually want to roll up your sleeves and get down to work, we've laid out idea after idea: an across-the-board wage freeze, ending the bankable sick days, closing the McGuinty loophole for senior bureaucrats, and an economic statement this fall that actually reduces spending, will reduce the size and cost of government. If you don't like all four, pick one, pick two, but, please, do something and use the session to get serious about our budget deficit.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period, the Leader of the Opposition quoted Winston Churchill. It reminded me of something Mr. Churchill said in the British House of Commons to the Leader of the Opposition. He said, "The member opposite is a modest man, and he has much to be modest about, Mr. Speaker"—no plan. They want to cut taxes. They want to cut education. This government's about protecting full-day learning. It's about smaller class sizes. It's a real plan that's working.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to take a course of action that will result in the ultimate failure of the policy. We won't do that. We are going to do it in a fair, responsible, balanced manner. We will achieve two years of pay freeze. We will manage performance pay. That's the right plan. It's about schools. It's about health care. It's about a better future for all Ontarians.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member for—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Toronto—Danforth.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):—Davenport.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Welcome back, Speaker. Welcome back.

My question is to the Premier. Today's the first day of school across Ontario; proud parents are taking their children to class, yet for months the Premier's been insisting that the sky was falling on Ontario schools. Can the Premier tell us: Where's the crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think if my honourable colleague checks the record, he'll notice that I've never used that word.

Let me just speak to the importance of all of us as Ontarians celebrating the progress that we keep making inside our schools. Ontario schools have never been stronger. Ontario parents have never been able to have more confidence in the education we're delivering to them inside our schools. Class sizes are down. Test

scores are up by a dramatic 16 points. Graduation rates are up by a dramatic 14 points. The increase in university enrolment in Ontario has gone up by 26%. That is double the national average.

Ontario families are on to the notion of education in a big way. They wanted us to do everything that we can to continue to support good-quality, publicly funded education for our kids. We've heard those marching orders loud and clear, Speaker. That's exactly what we're going to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize to the member from Toronto—Danforth.

Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

In a desperate attempt to win back majority power, the Premier insisted labour, peace and stability was at risk unless a simplistic and unconstitutional bill was passed immediately. He recalled the Legislature weeks early and, as late as last week, Liberals were planning to sit through the long weekend. Instead this morning, we've come back from a long weekend; kids are in class; and teachers are teaching them. Will the Premier admit that the sky was never falling?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm proud of the progress and the stability that we have in our schools. I want to commend Ontario teachers, Speaker. We have engaged them in a difficult conversation. It had to do with our financial circumstances—a need for us, together, to make an intelligent, responsible choice that puts students first. I know it's been somewhat difficult, but they're there today. They bring their usual professional approach, their devotion, their enthusiasm, their commitment to Ontario's children and young people, and I thank them for taking on that responsibility. I thank them for carrying on a conversation with our government that has not, in fact, encroached upon the classrooms.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Unfortunately, the Premier's desperate attempt to win back a majority will have a real impact. Constitutional experts tell us it's likely to be thrown out by the Supreme Court and cost us hundreds of millions of dollars. In the meantime, we will have conflict in our classrooms.

Later today, the Premier will shut down discussion of his short-sighted plan. Why won't he stop playing politics with our classrooms and push the pause button on this legislation before we wind up with a \$1-billion bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's a good opportunity yet again for Ontarians to understand the markedly conflicting advice we get from the opposition parties. The NDP tell us that we're being far too aggressive and we should not apply any restraint measures of any kind whatsoever at any time. They want to give teachers a pay hike. The PCs, on the other hand, are telling us we're being far too timid, that we should completely ignore process and jurisprudence, decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada, and instead apply a solution

holus-bolus across the board. That would not stand the test of the courts.

So we are in the middle. We're balanced, we're thoughtful and responsible. We're respecting process, as required, Speaker. But at the end of the day, we've got to draw a line in the sand. We've got to make a choice on behalf of families. What we're saying is we're going to hit the pause button on teacher pay, and the money that we have available for education will go into keeping class sizes down, which supports teaching jobs, roll out full-day kindergarten, which supports teaching jobs, and continue to put in place the supports we need to get those test scores even higher and those graduation rates up even further.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Earlier today, the Premier insisted that he wanted this legislation behind him sooner rather than later. But the Premier knows we're headed for a lengthy and divisive court battle. Given that this is one that is likely to see the bill overturned, does the Premier really believe a lengthy court battle that could cost families hundreds of millions of dollars is in the best interests of students?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much, Speaker. As I've had the chance to say in this House before, we didn't take the decision to introduce legislation lightly. But after six months of working with our partners in education, we felt that we needed to act in the best interests of students in taking these steps. As we have said on many occasions, if this bill is passed and then challenged in court, our position will be that it is constitutional, that we've respected the constitutionally protected right to a process of collective bargaining, and that, in any event, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, this bill is both reasonable and justified in all the circumstances.

In the supplementary, I look forward to having an opportunity to detail the very significant differences that exist between Ontario's circumstance and that in British Columbia.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Back to the Premier. After months of warning that Conservative proposals were simplistic and unconstitutional, the Premier is now plowing ahead with a bill that is just as simplistic, just as unconstitutional. Does the Premier have any evidence to back his claim that this legislation won't cost families millions more in the long run? Or is he once again attempting to buy short-term political gain by making risky commitments, knowing families will pay the price after the by-election?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I think it's important to take a moment to acknowledge what this legislation, if it does pass, saves our province.

It puts in place the agreement that we've reached with OECTA. More than 55,000 teachers have signed on to that agreement. Just last week, about 3,000 educational assistants also signed on to that agreement. So we've continued to work with our partners in education.

If we put this agreement in place right across the province, Speaker, it saves the province \$1.4 billion in this fiscal, \$250 million and \$540 million in the next—so about \$2 billion. And it averts \$473 million in additional costs. So there is a lot at risk, and it is a risk that we prevent the province from having to cross if we put in place this legislation. That is why we're asking for all members in this House to support it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, legal experts say this bill won't stand up in court. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says it violates the charter. The government says they don't care, just like they didn't care when they cancelled gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville, where the full costs are still unknown but already climbing into the hundreds of millions. Why is the Premier rolling the dice with Ontario's classrooms?

1050

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me take a moment just to talk about the differences between the circumstances here in Ontario and in British Columbia.

In the BC case, the government gave 20 minutes' notice to the unions that they were changing the collective agreement. As a consequence, they were subject to the Supreme Court ruling, which found that they did not respect the constitutionally protected right to a process of consultation and consideration in good faith.

In Ontario, as we've said, we've been at the table in discussions since February and we've been clear about the challenges that we need to meet together. Even now, we're not closing the door on negotiated settlements.

Let me read from the Supreme Court ruling in the BC case:

"There was no meaningful consultation with unions before it became law. Union representatives expressed their desire to be further consulted. The Minister of Health ... telephoned a union representative 20 minutes before Bill 29 was introduced in the Legislative Assembly to inform the union that the government would be introducing" this.

That was the only consultation with unions before the act was passed, Speaker—very different circumstances here in Ontario.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, sources have confirmed that airport shuttle buses have been outside the campaign headquarters of your Liberal candidate in the Kitchener–Waterloo by-election. We also know that Liberal ministers have been coming and going to Waterloo to bribe voters yet again

with their own money. But Premier, how did they get to Kitchener—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Michael Harris: Withdraw.

Did they wait in gridlock on the 401? Did they take the non-existent full-day GO service you promised and failed to deliver? Or did the ministers and Liberal staffers take the government's private plane? Premier, can you confirm today, yes or no, that the government's King Air private plane has not been used to shuttle yourself, ministers or political staff at any time during the last month to Kitchener–Waterloo?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think there's a really important opportunity for voters in Kitchener–Waterloo to vote in the upcoming by-election. I think it's a healthy exercise in democracy. There's an important collision of ideas and political philosophies that will take—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are driven in our determination to score a victory there, but we're also driving there back and forth in cars, Speaker, just so my colleagues understand. We look forward to the outcome of the by-election and we're grateful to have had the opportunity to present our particular program moving forward and the progress that we've secured by working together with people in that community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier: I'll give you a second chance on this one.

The Premier must believe he can get frequent flyer miles for the evasive answers that he's giving us this morning.

The government's King Air private plane is for official government purposes only. It's used as a campaign expense, and you know it.

Premier, don't you think that voters in Kitchener–Waterloo would find it unsettling that they have to sit in gridlock on the 401 while you and your Liberal ministers use a private plane to take a 15-minute flight to Kitchener–Waterloo? So I ask you again: Will you commit to reimburse Ontario taxpayers for the inappropriate use of the government's private plane, yes or no?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to reassure my honourable colleague that nobody has in fact used any government plane.

I also want to say: This is a rather desperate bid at this point in time. What about talking about our schools and the future of education in Ontario? What about talking about health care and some of the concerns people in Kitchener–Waterloo might have? What about talking about how we can better work hand in hand with organizations like Communitech, for example, or the universities and the college in that community? What about talking about the public transit system that we are continuing to invest in there? What about talking about the

investment we're going to make in a highway there? What about the new family health teams that we have put in place? What about the investment we made in their hospitals? What about the new schools we have built? What about the new medical schools? What about the new school of pharmacy we put in that riding? You'd think they might want to touch on some of those issues here today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Next week, all the legislative committees are set to disband, regardless of any unfinished business. I know that the Premier will say that he's anxious to hear a report from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, but the reality is that the public accounts committee continues to uncover new information and details about what occurred at Ornge, calling back witnesses and getting to the bottom of how this could have all gone so wrong.

My question is simple: Despite the fact that I'm sure the government side is anxious to hear from a report, will the Premier guarantee that the public accounts committee will continue to meet to do their important work on getting to the bottom of what happened at Ornge, and that next week we will continue?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us have been very cognizant of the work that's been done by the public accounts committee. I have the most recent statistics. It has now sat for 81 hours and heard from 56 witnesses who have appeared. It will be holding work this week.

The challenge that we have given to the public accounts committee is now that they have entertained witnesses, now that they've looked into it, that they come back with the types of recommendations that this government can use, that the Legislature can use, to make sure that the situation at Ornge will never take place again. We've seen the good action of the Minister of Health, but it now comes down to Bill 50, which we call on all members of the House to support when it comes forward.

As to the member's specific question about the public accounts committee, I think the member should check with his House leader, and what he'll find is the question over membership at committees expires next week, but the committees themselves will continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The scandal continues to astound not only the committee members but also the public. I thank the member for his answer.

The question is again back to the Premier. Ontarians want to be assured that this will never happen again. They want some guarantees that this type of lack of oversight won't occur again in the future, but the only way we can do that is if the committee is able to continue its job and continue to sit past next week. So will the Premier make a commitment today and promise to Ontarians that we will be able to continue to do our work to get to the bottom of what happened at Ornge?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it's passing strange that when we sat down, the three parties, to discuss the composition of committees, in fact it was the opposition that asked that that composition be time-limited, which means that on Sunday, technically, at midnight, the composition motion expires. We are holding discussions with House leaders as to looking at a motion being brought to the Legislature to talk about it.

But you can't have it both ways. You can't stand up here and criticize the government for something that they've brought forward. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee has had weeks and weeks to look into the Ornge situation. We are calling on them to bring forward a report which will help us, which will help this government and future governments, in making sure that the proper oversight is given to agencies like Ornge in the future. We're also calling on them to pass Bill 50.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, as you know, this Legislature has been recalled early to deal with the very important issue of Ontario students and families, ensuring that school starts on time and continues uninterrupted.

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The Putting Students First Act is based on an agreement that the government reached with the Catholic teachers. Part of that memorandum of understanding with OECTA includes provisions around fair and transparent hiring processes. The party opposite says that this means that teachers will be hired based on seniority alone. Speaker, through you to the minister, is this true?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to speak to this issue yet again in the House, because it is absolutely untrue. Currently, there is no consistency or transparency on how new teachers are hired within and between boards. These new rules will ensure that boards and schools make hiring decisions based on a variety of criteria, including qualifications, suitability for the position, and the circumstance of the school, certainly not seniority alone. But jobs will be posted so young teachers know when they're available, because this isn't always the case right now, and hiring decisions won't be based on who you know.

Accountability is absolutely critical in a system funded by public dollars. I want to be clear: Management will still make the ultimate decision about who to hire, but that role comes with the responsibility to create a

process that can be accessed equally by everyone and understood by all. That's what we are driving for.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Minister, for setting the record straight. As an MPP, this is something that I hear about from my constituents. In fact, just this Friday I had a young teacher at my constituency office complaining about hiring practices. I have constituents who are young teachers who are smart, keen and so eager to gain experience in their profession. Many of them don't know anyone at the school board, and they don't know what the process is to apply for permanent jobs.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what will you do to bring transparency and accountability to the teacher hiring processes in Ontario?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Just as has been mentioned, I'm sure everyone in this Legislature knows a young teacher who is trying to get a job in Ontario and who wants nothing more than to use the skills that they have and stand up in front of a classroom. That's why we're so committed to bringing transparency to hiring teachers in the province. That's what we want to see implemented across the sector.

Our strong preference was to see these provisions, by way of our Putting Students First Act, in every local agreement. But as I've said before, minority calls for reasonable compromise, and we'll instead move forward with these important changes in regulation under the Education Act. The establishment of consistent and fair hiring practices will strengthen our education system, and it's another way we're supporting young teachers, just like the change that was advanced for this September where retired teachers will be limited to a maximum of 50 teaching days per year, down from 95, so that young teachers can gain the experience in our classrooms across the province.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. One hour of the Premier's time: That's all the committee that's investigating the scandal at Ornge asked of the Premier. He refused the committee's request to attend last Wednesday. He told everybody there was a cabinet meeting, and yet it turned out to be a photo op. So the committee offered the Premier an alternative date.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Frank Klees: That's tomorrow. And he yet again refused to appear.

The Toronto Star editorial headline said this: "Let the Premier clear the air." It went on to say, "The buck stops at the Premier's office, and he should be prepared to testify to clear the air."

Why won't the Premier agree to do that? What is he hiding?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I was hoping that there might be a real question there, but there wasn't.

I have spoken to this matter on several occasions in the past, but I do want to introduce a slightly different perspective on this. I think it's time to put patients ahead of partisan politics. Ornge provides air transportation to over 19,000 Ontarians every single year. You would think that this was a matter of some urgency, this issue. The committee has sat for many, many hours, and Ontarians still continue to await the outcome of their deliberations.

They say it's a matter of public safety, they say it's a matter of tremendous urgency, and yet they keep delaying coming forward with advice and recommendations that we might adopt on behalf of those 19,000 patients who are being transported every single year. I think it's time for us to receive those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Mr. Speaker, what is it that the Premier does not understand about the committee's request that he appear? It seems everyone but the Premier understands the importance of his testimony. Here's what the Toronto Star had to say: "McGuinty has yet to explain, for example, why he said he'd only met Mazza once, when Mazza testified they'd met three times. He has yet to tell Ontarians why he and his ministers brushed off questions in the Legislature 16 months ago about the ballooning cost of the air ambulance service and why it took a string of front-page stories by the Star's Kevin Donovan and a damning report by the province's Auditor General, Jim McCarter, to get the government to take this issue seriously."

It goes on to say that Dalton McGuinty is the only one who can answer one more secret, and that is, according to the Toronto Star, "How did this fiasco happen on his watch?"

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

A gentle reminder to all members that when I say "thank you," that's the end of your question.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I acknowledge that the committee has been doing some important work, Speaker. I acknowledge as well that the criticism offered by an independent, objective third party, that is the Auditor General, said that we failed to bring the necessary oversight to bear over the activities at Ornge. He's right, Speaker, and we accept that. That's why we have made numerous changes, from the change in the leadership there to a new performance agreement.

We also have a specific legislative initiative. It's a bill before this House. It's Bill 50. We'd like to move forward with that. Just last week—just last week—when we sought unanimous consent so that it would receive quick passage; they denied us that. So they say this is not a matter of political gamesmanship, it's a matter of the public interest, but I think that speaks otherwise.

I encourage my honourable colleagues opposite to conclude the work of the committee, give us the recommendations, so we can ensure we are doing our utmost to

protect the safety of those 19,000 Ontarians who are transported by Ornge every single year.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. Last night in Toronto, women and men took to the streets following the recent sexual assaults in the west end of our city, demanding safer homes, streets, and better supports for victims of sexual violence. Ending sexual violence requires dedicated and coordinated work from both the community and all levels of government, but funding from the McGuinty government for organizations like Victim Services Toronto has been frozen since 2007. Why is the government balancing its books on the backs of victims of violence?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'd like to take a moment in this Legislature to acknowledge, once again, that sexual violence is prevalent in the lives of far too many women. It is brought to stark light when we see circumstances in our city that one in three women will experience some form of sexual violence in her lifetime, and that, Mr. Speaker, is totally unacceptable.

Sexual violence has a devastating impact on the lives of victims and their families, and it will not be tolerated. That's why our government has taken strong action in the past, working very aggressively on a complete sexual violence action plan that we released last year that included \$15 million in investments over four years in public education, training and community services. We look to continue to support women who are survivors and to prevent this from happening in our city and across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Back to the Premier: Torontonians have been shocked by the recent rash of sexual assaults in our community. Organizations like Victim Services Toronto—the largest and only of its kind—is one of the very few places that victims of sexual assault can turn for support, financial help and protection from repeated assault. But funding for this program has fallen in real terms by more than 25% over the past 20 years, in spite of greatly increased demand. If the government recognizes the importance of programs like this and their role in ending sexual violence, when will your cuts end?

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Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me just reiterate that it is certainly our hope that the Toronto police will bring whoever is responsible to justice. We urge everyone with information to come forward, because we want individuals like this off our streets in our city and around our province.

Let me highlight the sexual violence action plan, which included \$15 million in investments over four years in public education, training and community services. It was an example of the development of an action plan where we worked with the grassroots community,

where we worked with rape crisis centres and our sexual assault centres across the province, and provided \$3 million to Ontario's 42 sexual assault centres to help them better respond to women in their communities, like those women who may be seeking assistance in these circumstances.

We've also invested over \$3 million to expand the language interpreter services program to help sexual violence victims whose first language is not English or French. This program will help women in more than 60 languages.

In those investments, we look to better support women, and we look to support all of the women, in the city and across the province.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, I was pleased to have the opportunity to ask the minister about health care services for the residents in my riding of Ottawa Centre and to hear her report on the important successes we have seen in our city's emergency care. We have reduced wait times by ensuring access to care at the right time in the right place.

However, access to health care isn't just important for my constituents; it is important to every Ontarian. Our government has proudly worked hard for our families, our seniors and our residents to improve access to quality health care no matter where they live in our province. However, there's always more to do.

I would like to ask the minister how this government has increased access to health care services in other areas of Ontario besides my community of Ottawa.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That's a very good question. Throughout Ontario, we have made significant investments to improve access to care, and patients are seeing the difference.

Perhaps today I'll focus on part of our province: the Waterloo Wellington LHIN, for example. I'm very happy to report that 96% of people in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN now have a family doctor.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: That's great.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: That is terrific—96%. And 194 more doctors are working in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN; 102 of those are family physicians; 92 are specialists. That's a 22% increase in the number of doctors. The population of that area is growing. It has grown by about 10% since 2003, but the number of doctors has gone up by 22%.

Waterloo-Wellington is not the only area that has seen improved access to care. In fact, across this great province, patients are getting better care, and they're getting it more quickly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Improving access to physicians in any community is vital to reducing wait times for Ontarians. As we discussed last week, this is an important component of how wait times are down in my commun-

ity of Ottawa. I'm proud of these accomplishments, most of all because the residents I represent are able to get the care they need faster and get back to living their lives. We all remember how long wait times for hip and knee surgeries used to be, and we all remember how wait times kept increasing due to chronic underfunding of our hospitals under past governments.

As proud as I am that we have experienced significant improvements in Ottawa, I think it is important for Ontarians in other regions to know how this government has been working on their behalf. To the minister: How has this government increased investments to reduce wait times in other areas of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member is quite right. We have increased investments in our hospitals: in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN, for example. At Cambridge Memorial Hospital, funding has gone up by 25%; at St. Mary's General Hospital, an increase of 42%; at Grand River hospital, an increase of 61%.

What's important is not the increase in funding but the impact that that's having on patients. Those investments are paying off. Wait times have come down dramatically. Cancer surgery: We are now meeting our target; we've reduced wait times for cancer surgery by 43%. Cataract surgery: We're meeting our target; we're down 47%. Hip surgery: We're meeting our target; we've reduced the wait time by 58%. We've taken almost a year off the wait time for hip surgery. Knee surgery has been cut in half. Wait time for an MRI has been down 28%.

We've come a long way, Speaker, working with our doctors, our hospitals—more to do, but we've come a long way.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker, and welcome back.

My question is to the Premier. Premier, you claim that your government wants to get to the bottom of the Ornge scandal, but, based on your actions, all you want to do is run from the truth. In order to provide the House with an accurate recommendation, the committee needs all members, all witnesses, to come forward so we can get the whole truth.

Premier, you've now refused twice to appear before the committee and answer for your involvement in the mess at Ornge—just one hour of your time. Ontarians want and deserve to know: Will you stop cowering behind the privilege that protects you in this House, do the honourable thing and testify about your involvement in Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm certain, if there were good questions that my honourable colleague wanted to put to me, he would have put one to me just now, Speaker, but he hasn't.

Let me tell you a little bit about what we've been able to do, working together on the Ornge issue as a com-

mittee and in this Legislature, to demonstrate just how thorough it's been.

There have been, until today, 470 questions related to Ornge asked in this Legislature. There have been countless questions as well that I've received from the media. They have received 56 witnesses. They've taken up 81 hours of committee time over the course of 16 days. They've examined thousands of pages of documents, and they've led to the production of over 800 pages of Hansard. It seems to me, Speaker, that the committee has been nothing if not thorough.

What we need now is to move ahead with Bill 50—setting aside the recommendations for a moment, move ahead with Bill 50, which enhances oversight and accountability at Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Walker: Mr. Speaker, my question again goes back to the Premier. It's clear that the Premier is hiding from something or protecting someone. I would ask you a question today, but you would avoid it. That's why we want you at the committee. Too many of your key players and Liberal insiders in this scandal are connected to you, the Premier, including former Liberal Party president Alf Apps, campaign manager Don Guy, Lisa Kirbie, Jennifer Tracey, and the Premier's office's current senior adviser, health, Sophia Ikura. Out of all the witnesses that have testified before the committee, only two have refused: the infamous Dr. Chris Mazza was the first, and you are the second. We all know why Dr. Mazza was hiding his involvement from the committee. The question becomes, what are you hiding, Premier, and will you testify before the committee tomorrow?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: And none of that was rehearsed whatsoever, Mr. Speaker—none of that whatsoever.

Since my honourable colleague doesn't have any questions of substance here today, I wonder if we might return to a matter of real substance. That's Bill 50. It's An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. We'd like to move ahead with that.

We have in place new leadership at Ornge. We have in place a new performance agreement. We have the recommendations from the auditor. There's an ongoing OPP investigation. But there's something that we can do together while we wait for them to come up with their recommendations, Speaker, and that's to move ahead with Bill 50. So I'd ask my honourable colleague and his colleagues in his caucus, as well as the NDP, why is it that they continue to oppose Bill 50, which enhances this government's power of oversight over Ornge?

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Premier. On Friday, this government announced the creation of the

Northern Policy Institute, confirming what northerners have known for years: The Liberals don't get the north. The last thing the north needs is another initiative or another report to tell us what we need. We know what we need. The problem is that this government isn't listening. What the north needs now is real action and real investment.

My question is simple. Since the government has now admitted it has no plan for the north, will it commit today to creating a committee of northern MPPs who can provide real consultation and action to move our economy forward?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: On Friday, the members for Thunder Bay–Superior North and Thunder Bay–Atikokan, the member from Sault Ste. Marie and I were very, very proud to announce that we have and are going to move forward with the Northern Policy Institute.

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With all due respect to the member who asked the question, it's just another example of how out of touch the third party is with the wishes of northerners. They're not reflective of the northern reality. Northerners, over the many years we consulted on the northern growth plan, asked for one thing: that we establish a Northern Policy Institute that would be an independent body; that it be made up of experts, people who are not appointed by order-in-council; that they ensure that they reflect the uniqueness of northern Ontario. We did that on Friday. We're very proud of it, and so are northerners.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Back to the Premier: You're not fooling anyone with this latest announcement. The problem isn't that the north isn't providing the input; it's that you're not listening to us. We have said no to the Far North Act, no to the closure of the travel information centres and no to this government's backroom deals on the Ring of Fire. MPPs in this Legislature voted in favour of creating a committee that would bring northern voices to the table and would not have diverted \$5 million from the northern Ontario heritage fund, but you said no to the north.

I ask again: Will you commit today to respecting the democratic will of this House and create a northern committee, or are you once again going to say no to the north?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The reality that we're faced with here is that northerners asked this government to establish a Northern Policy Institute. The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association all asked for the same thing: that we establish an independent body, a body that will focus on policy for northern Ontario, a body that is independent of government and that will rely on expert advice from around northern Ontario in order to shape the policy that's going to affect northern Ontario. The reality is that this is very, very popular across northern

Ontario. The biggest reality is that this third party is clearly out of sync and does not understand the priorities of northern Ontario.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the minister responsible for the 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. Minister, over the summer we heard some very strange claims coming from the opposition about the games. It's very clear from your previous public comments and from information that's posted on the Toronto 2015 website that the overall budget for the games remains unchanged at \$1.4 billion. I also saw that TO2015 has committed to ongoing regular public reports, including budget updates beginning in the fall. Despite this, some opposition members seem to be claiming that the budget for the games is unknown. The strangest request is that they've called for the government to release details of projects that are currently under tender. Minister, could you please clear this up?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member from Oakville for the question. I appreciate the opportunity to clear up any confusion that may exist across the aisle. As the member mentioned, an updated budget for the games, as well as audited financial statements, are available online at the 2015 website, as well as the Ontario.ca Pan Am website.

Regarding procurement: Unfortunately, members opposite do appear to be confused about how the process works. The member from Barrie has recklessly requested that Ontario reveal specific project costs before we even receive the bids. Doing so would be irresponsible and would result in inflated bids. We're not going to do that. Instead, we're going to get the best value for Ontario taxpayers. That means we're going to continue to use a procurement process that's open, fair, competitive and transparent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Minister. I certainly appreciate that clarification. I only wish the confusion ended across the aisle, though, as well. Over the summer, the PC caucus appeared to be divided as to which financial model should be used for large infrastructure projects. I know that Infrastructure Ontario has built a reputation for very successful partnerships with the private sector. I was always under the impression that the PCs were in favour of private sector investment, but the member from Barrie seemed to side with the NDP over the summer in calling for Infrastructure Ontario to reject partnerships with the private sector.

Minister, can you confirm that alternative finance procurement is being used to deliver Pan Am projects and that this is also the proven method for delivering large projects of this type?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I, too, was also surprised by the member from Barrie's position. In a July 15 article on Simcoe.com, the member is quoted as saying this: "This kind of public-private partnership typically ends up cost-

ing taxpayers substantially more.” But as far as I can tell, his leader disagrees. In a 2011 interview about public transit in Toronto, Tim Hudak said this: “I think we need to look at public-private partnerships for the infrastructure in our province.”

It's very difficult to know where the PC Party stands from one day to the next. In fact, we are using a tried-and-true procurement method that has brought more than 50 alternative financing projects to market since 2005, worth more than \$23 billion and saving taxpayers more than \$500 million.

I'm very happy to confirm that the procurement for the major Pan Am venues is proceeding on schedule, and that the details of the budget and venue status are already publicly available on our website.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, a continuous flood of members from your cabinet have been linked to the Ornge scandal, from health minister after health minister, right to your current Minister of Natural Resources and now yourself. It doesn't end there. You've been linked to the scandal through former Liberal president Alf Apps, though your campaign manager Don Guy, and countless other Liberal insiders.

Premier, third time is the charm. Ontarians want you to stop dodging requests to testify. Will you finally agree to come clean before the committee and millions of Ontarians about your involvement in Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that with every passing question it becomes more and more apparent how consumed my honourable colleagues opposite are by partisanship and gamesmanship when it comes to the Ornge matter.

We accept our responsibility for not bringing the necessary oversight to bear. If I've said that once, Speaker, I've said it at least a dozen times. We've made some very dramatic changes. We have new leadership in place. We have a new performance agreement there. We've adopted wholeheartedly the recommendations put forward by the auditor. We have a lot of those contained within Bill 50, and we'd like to move forward with that, but my honourable colleagues oppose that positive step forward.

Again, I think the responsibility we bear in government is to uphold the greater public interest. That demands at this point in time that we receive recommendations from the committee so we can get on with the work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: The people of Ontario are wondering when their Premier plans to be open and honest about his involvement in Ornge. How many more connections to the Premier will it take for him to finally testify to the public accounts committee? Despite your answers in the House, or lack thereof, the committee knows that you've met with Chris Mazza more than once. In fact Alf Apps, in a memo, tells Dr. Mazza to downplay your meeting at

lunch with George Smitherman. Premier, your fingerprints are all over Ornge. They're all over this scandal. Why won't you testify before the public accounts committee tomorrow and clear the air before the by-elections?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my honourable colleague, I know he's still relatively new here but he should not allow them to do that to him. He should not allow them to do that to him.

I think the question that I would have on behalf of the good people of Barrie is, why is it that the opposition parties are standing in the way of Bill 50? Why are they standing in the way of us taking a positive approach that is solutions-based when it comes to addressing some of the issues at Ornge?

We'd like to bring the necessary legislative oversight to bear on Ornge. We can't do that until we have Bill 50 become law. Again, I ask my honourable colleague and his caucus colleagues as well if they'll lend us their support in that regard.

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CORRECTIONAL FACILITY EMPLOYEES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety. For over three weeks, Minister, the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre has been in a lockdown mode. The guards initially went out because management refused to allow them to take necessary safety measures related to weapons search. Despite some progress in working out search protocol, the jail refuses to allow the guards to go back to work. Your ministry and the labour ministry decided the situation was resolved to their satisfaction—not to the people who perform this dangerous work day in and day out.

Instead of disciplining guards who simply don't want to work in unsafe conditions, why won't this minister finally resolve this dangerous situation without any management retaliation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I appreciate the question very much; I had a question like this last week. I've met with the official of the union at the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre. Again, the staff have been working diligently all week and during the weekend to try to resolve the problem.

But again, there is a misunderstanding, or not an agreement, about this work stoppage. Is this labour-related, or is it health and safety-related? After the visit of the Ministry of Labour inspector, they determined that the work refusal claims did not meet the criteria outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The reasons for refusal were, in fact—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: —[inaudible] aspect of a correctional officer's job.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Actually, when someone went into the jail, all the managers apparently had their protective equipment on. So that's interesting.

Minister, jail cells at the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre are about eight feet wide and 12 feet long. In many cells, there are three inmates, with the third prisoner sleeping on a plastic-coated mattress on the concrete floor. A jail that was built to house 510 inmates now houses close to 600. Is this minister going to make this situation bad to worse, or will she immediately take action to deal with this unsafe and potentially violent situation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, the safety of those who are working in our jail system and of the inmates is of the utmost importance for us, and we want to make sure that everyone there is safe. Unfortunately, we cannot control who comes to our jail—it's not like we are closing the door. So the doors are open. At times, especially those who we call weekenders—when they come into the jail during the weekend, yes, it's sometimes overcrowded. We're going to admit it. It is overcrowded. But we do try to move inmates to other correctional facilities to make sure we are keeping our jails safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my point of order refers to standing order 23, subsections (h) and (i). Specifically, it relates to the Premier's responses to questions relating to the Ornge air ambulance service.

Over the last couple of months, the Premier has repeatedly referred to opposition questions as being motivated by partisan interests. Subsection (i), as you know, refers specifically to the imputing of “false or unavowed motives” to members of this House. I refer you—I actually have copies of eight specific references. The Premier again today, in response to questions relating to the Ornge air ambulance scandal, twice referred to the opposition as being motivated and having partisan motive in asking their question.

On August 30, the Premier said this: “I want to assure Ontarians they're for the partisan interest”—referring to the opposition—“we remain solely for the public interest.”

Again on August 30, the Premier—Speaker, I'll wait until I have your attention.

Again on August 30, the Premier said this: “Speaker, I've spoken on countless occasions about how my honourable colleagues in opposition see the matter of Ornge purely as a partisan political game.”

I ask you, Speaker, to rule on this issue. I think it's straightforward. It is an insult to us and the members of the opposition, and it is clearly not in order—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to remind the member that I'm standing, and indeed I have been listening. I did not hear anything that was untoward in the House, but I will take a moment to remind all members that to impugn one's motive is something that I listen for very carefully, and I did not hear that today.

The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. John Milloy: It's a different point of order. Mr. Speaker, earlier today, a question was asked about the

use of King Air and Waterloo-Wellington regional airport. I'd like to inform the House we have confirmed that in fact not only has it not happened during the campaign; it hasn't landed or taken off at all in 2012—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated. Again, I will remind all members that when I stand, everyone sits.

That is not a point of order.

The member from Newmarket–Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, with due respect, I do ask you to do this for me. If you would take into consideration the information that I will present to you that relates to the Premier's—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members have an opportunity to submit to me anything that they wish in terms of documents. But I would suggest to the member: I did rule on it and I have ruled on it. You don't like the ruling.

The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to make sure I properly understood the government House leader. He said that King Air has never been used in 2012. Is that what I heard?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes.

This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BACK-TO-SCHOOL BARBECUE

Mr. Rod Jackson: This past Saturday, I had the pleasure to host a back-to-school barbecue in my riding in St. Vincent Park. We had perfect weather and close to 200 people attend on the long weekend. We had many young families and their children, and we had a great time.

I'm pleased to announce that together we raised over \$1,000, and thousands of school supplies, for students and families in need. One third of households say that back-to-school shopping put a burden on their household budgets. As a testament to the strength of the community in Barrie, people have taken it upon themselves to continue the back-to-school supplies drive and continue to drop off items at my constituency office. It makes me very proud.

Thank you to all those who contributed to the success of the event. Jim Fraser, a teacher in my riding, organized the egg- and balloon-toss games for the kids. Children's entertainer Steve Kavaratzis—I hope I got that right, Steve—led the kids through interactive activities; Lawrence Vindum, from The Butcher Shop, donated all the food, and it was amazing; Scoops and Cones gave out ice cream for free; and the Enbridge community team

prepared the barbecue. Twenty community volunteers came out to help. I'd like to thank my constituency team for all their great work. Fun was certainly had by all.

Everyone came together to launch our first annual back-to-school barbecue. It supported a great cause in the process in our community, and I look forward to next year's.

SIKH CHANNEL

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm very pleased to rise in the House today to share with the House a great occasion that occurred yesterday. September 3 was the official launch of the Sikh Channel. The Sikh Channel is a well-known channel that broadcasts currently in the UK, across Europe and also in India. They have a very large viewership and are a long-running channel, and are now moving into Canada. Yesterday was the official launch ceremony. Many people were in attendance, and it was a great honour to be there.

The initiative of the Sikh Channel was, first and foremost, an education program. The purpose of the channel was to provide the broader community with awareness and knowledge about the Sikh faith. The market, or the audience, was Sikh and non-Sikh. Particularly when we see tragedies like what happened in Wisconsin and very sad and tragic events of that nature, we realize that fear and ignorance are the breeding grounds for hatred. When we can replace that fear and ignorance with love and understanding, we can move towards a more accepting climate.

I hope that the Sikh Channel can be a part of that initiative by providing education and informative programming about what the Sikh faith is about, so that we can move towards a more understanding climate, so we can all live in greater harmony. I salute the Sikh Channel for its great initiatives in providing that education.

PREMIER'S AWARD FOR AGRI-FOOD INNOVATION EXCELLENCE

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I rise today to congratulate local innovators who recently received a Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence at a ceremony in Guelph. The award recognizes the success of the recipient's innovations which improve existing products, create jobs and drive economic growth.

Award recipients recognized in Guelph included Carrick Wines and Ciders, from Mildmay; Conlee Farms, from Listowel; Creemore 100 Mile Store, Creemore; Delhome Farms, Milverton; Full of Beans, Bornholm; Hilton Soy Foods, Staffa; Jones Feed Mills Ltd., from Linwood; Nicholyn Farms, from Phelpsston; Primeridge Pure, from Markdale; Simcoe County Cattlemen's Association, Shanty Bay; and Stemmler Meats and Cheese Inc., from Heidelberg.

Our government began this program six years ago to recognize innovators for their great ideas and help spread awareness of their farm and food businesses. We salute

these individuals for having the passion to turn their ideas into results, and we thank them for all that they do to provide us with fresh, local foods in our homes, in our communities, and help to grow Ontario's agriculture industry.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Todd Smith: We all know of the McGuinty government's shameful record on manufacturing job losses. The numbers are simply staggering: 300,000 manufacturing jobs lost since this government took power.

Few communities know the bitter sting of the Liberal economic disaster better than Kitchener-Waterloo. In 2006, they lost BFGoodrich and 1,100 jobs there. In 2008, they lost Kitchener Frame, formerly known as Budd Automotive, and another 1,200 jobs there. In 2014, they're scheduled to lose Maple Leaf Foods and yet another 1,200 jobs. That Maple Leaf Plant goes back to J.M. Schneider's original butcher shop that started in Kitchener back in 1890. It survived two World Wars, a Great Depression, a Cold War and a half-dozen recessions but couldn't survive through this government's reign.

This government's policies are killing manufacturing in this province. High-paying jobs are leaving Ontario for provinces and states with lower energy costs, lower tax rates and less regulation. No one knows this better than those living in Kitchener-Waterloo.

I was at the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce all-candidates meeting just last Wednesday. The only party articulating a clear vision for economic growth for that riding and the entire province of Ontario just happens to be the PC Party of Ontario and our leader, Tim Hudak.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: On September 1, I joined the community of Pellatt for a fundraising pig roast in support of the community's volunteer fire department.

Like most communities across Ontario, Pellatt and the surrounding area is made safer thanks to a group of volunteers who are willing to risk their own lives to save others.

I would like to take this moment to commend not only the members of the Pellatt United Firefighters but all volunteer firefighters in my riding and across the province.

It's hard to believe that in this day and age these dedicated individuals not only have to give up their own time to train but to also fundraise for the equipment that is essential for them to do their jobs safely and effectively, including personal safety equipment.

Volunteer firefighters provide essential and life-saving services not only in the case of fires but also by acting as first responders in other emergencies, such as car accidents and other things. That is why today I want to take the opportunity not only to say thank you but to call on

my counterparts in this chamber to provide firefighters with the support they need.

Saying thank you is one thing, but we all need to do our parts to ensure that our words of appreciation are supported by adequate and reliable funding to our brave first responders.

SECOND BASE YOUTH SHELTER

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak on the accomplishments of a very special group of young people in my riding.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the youth at Second Base Youth Shelter for successfully organizing the spectacular Community Fun Fair Fundraiser on August 25, 2012.

Second Base is a 56-bed co-ed shelter for youth aged 16 to 21 years. It is the second-largest youth shelter in the city of Toronto and the only youth shelter between Victoria Park Avenue and Oshawa. The shelter is located in my riding of Scarborough Southwest and houses and serves youth from all parts of the city of Toronto.

At Second Base, youth are facing vast challenges, and they find a supportive, non-judgmental, structured and empowered environment. Here, they have the opportunity to achieve personal growth, self-confidence and independence.

The youth at this shelter came together and organized this event in order to build stronger relations with the community and raise money for Second Base. They offer safe, fun space for the whole community to gather and enjoy themselves in the spirit of summer, and offer a wide variety of activities.

Please join me in congratulating the youth of Second Base for their dedication and motivation in planning the fundraiser. Their enthusiasm in establishing positive relations within the community of Scarborough Southwest is admirable, and their leadership skills must be acknowledged.

UNITED WAY OF LEEDS AND GRENVILLE

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a privilege to pay tribute to an organization in Leeds-Grenville making a real difference to people of all ages and all walks of life.

The United Way of Leeds and Grenville is busily preparing to launch its 55th annual campaign, an effort that provides essential funding for its 28 member agencies.

Thanks to the unwavering support of the United Way, these agencies provide hope and help to more than 36,000 people across my riding. That means that one in every three residents of Leeds-Grenville benefit directly from the United Way campaign.

Unfortunately, I'll be here at Queen's Park a week from tomorrow, when the 2012 kickoff breakfast officially launches the campaign. However, I wish executive director Judy Baril and her team, president Nancy Duffy

and her board, and campaign co-chairs Cathy and Ben TeKamp and their team all the best in reaching this year's goal.

1510

It's a daunting task to go into a fundraising campaign in these tough economic times, but it's reassuring to Judy and her team to know they can count on the incredible generosity of the people of Leeds-Grenville. In fact, despite that difficult economy, last year the United Way made history as it hit the \$1-million mark for its first time. The people of Leeds-Grenville dug deep because they know the agencies supported by our United Way are there when their friends, neighbours and their own families need them the most.

I want to wish you all the best on a successful campaign.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise in the House today to congratulate the town of Ajax on being selected to host the softball and baseball events for the Toronto Pan/Parapan American Games in 2015.

Hundreds of athletes and thousands of spectators will pass through my riding of Ajax-Pickering, showcasing our wonderful community and cultural diversity on the world stage. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity will provide lasting local economic benefits and provide a world-class sport venue here in Ajax for the community to use for years to come.

My Premier personally led the bid to host these games in Ontario, and I'm looking forward to the substantial job increases, as are the mayor and all members of Ajax council, with the tourism influxes and sport infrastructure improvements that will inevitably occur from hosting part of these games in Ajax. By ensuring that these games are affordable, accessible and boasting exceptional conditions for the athletes, I'm confident that our Premier's vision will come to full fruition at the Ajax Sportsplex.

So grab a glove and some Cracker Jacks, and let's get ready to play ball in Ajax.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good to see you back, sir.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise to express my appreciation to the residents of Elmvale who joined with me in an effort to restore medical lab services in the community. The decision to close Elmvale's specimen collection centre by the Georgian Bay General Hospital concerned all of us. Relocating those services to Midland caused great pains for those who rely on health care services that are closer to home. It caused hardship for families, especially those with elderly parents and relatives, and longer lineups, longer drives, and inconveniences like paying for parking at the Midland hospital just to get your blood checked.

After the closure, we immediately launched a campaign to get the lab in Elmvale reopened. I brought the issue to the floor of this Legislature more than 22 times on 22 different occasions, not including countless letters and various meetings with senior government officials. Those efforts were aided immensely by petitions and letters that were collected by Focus Elmvale and countless merchants who displayed our petition in their stores. We also enjoyed the strong support of Mayor Collins, Councillor Perry Ritchie and the rest of Springwater council.

Thanks to these persistent efforts, I was happy to announce this summer that LifeLabs, one of the largest providers of lab services in Ontario, would be opening the new specimen collection centre beginning July 31. LifeLabs is a leader in their field, and I want to welcome them to the community and thank them for their commitment to Elmvale.

Mr. Speaker, the lab is now open on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. in the medical building at 35 Queen Street West. I encourage all residents to make good use of the restored services.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated September 4, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Reports by committees?

Introduction of bills?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Isn't it motions?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We will do that once I'm finished with introduction of bills. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CONSULTING INC. ACT, 2012

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr6, An Act to revive Universal Health Consulting Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to be at the ready here to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and the Dalton McGuinty government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I'm pleased to sign and support it on behalf of the seniors of my riding and present it to Tameem, the page.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection

Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Sydney.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices” continue to drop; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

“Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

“Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario.”

I affix my signature.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north’s economy; and

“Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

“Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately.”

I wholeheartedly agree. I sign my signature and give it to page Dia.

1520

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the member churches of the Seaway Valley Presbytery are subject to the provisions of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08; and

“Whereas these churches and other non-profit organizations in eastern Ontario’s rural communities cannot afford to pay for the expensive testing required by this regulation or the volunteers to transport water samples to provincially accredited laboratories in urban centres hours away; and

“Whereas public health laboratories have the equipment necessary to conduct the testing required under Ontario regulation 319/08;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to allow non-profit organizations to have water testing done at existing public health laboratories at no cost.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Jacqueline.

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

“Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

“Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

“Whereas Bill 23 passed first reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones’s Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act.”

I obviously support this petition, and affix my name to it and give it to page Léo.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the report from Ontario’s Auditor General on the province’s air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers’ dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised; and

“Whereas Ornge officials created a ‘mini-conglomerate’ of private entities that enriched former senior

officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt; and

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined; and

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent; and

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge; and

"Whereas the latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle, where \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I agree with this petition, sign it and pass it to page Jacqueline.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my doctor's ability to provide care for me and my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Reverse the recent unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care."

These names were gathered by Dr. Kinga Koprowicz from Kirkfield, and hundreds of her patients have signed.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to under-

take X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

Mr. Speaker, that's a rather long petition, but I agree entirely with it and will affix my signature to it.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

"Whereas Ontario's largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

"Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real 'plan' for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government call for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed."

I support this petition and give it to page Jenna to give to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my

doctor's ability to provide care for me and my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Reverse the recent unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care."

I agree with this petition and will be signing it and handing it off to page Tameem.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully support this petition and I will sign it and give it to page Léo.

1530

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

"Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

"Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

"Whereas Bill 23 passed first reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones's Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act."

I'm happy to sign that and pass it to page Jacqueline.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector, when the bill is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and

That the vote on second reading shall not be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet on Wednesday, September 5, 2012, from 4:45 p.m. until 8 p.m. and Thursday, September 6, 2012, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill and on Thursday, September 6, 2012, following routine proceedings until 8 p.m. for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Thursday, September 6, 2012. At 7 p.m. on Thursday, September 6, 2012, those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, September 10, 2012. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, two hours shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Milloy has moved notice of government motion number 48. Mr. Milloy?

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm only going to speak for a minute or two and try to translate what has just happened into a little bit more of a description. What we've put forward today is known in parliamentary parlance as a time allocation motion. It effectively is outlining, if adopted by this Legislature, a path forward for the legislation to complete second reading. I should point out to members that we've had about eight and a half hours of debate, which reflects, I think, a fairly generous amount of time for discussion. It would then move through the committee process and be reported back for third reading, again outlining the parameters of the debate going forward.

I think members will understand why we've come to this point to bring it forward. The fact of the matter is, we're here in the Legislature two weeks earlier than usual. The House was expected to resume its business again next week, but we've unfortunately hit a situation with the education system that needs to be addressed with some urgency, hence the motion that's put forward.

Again, I think members of the House have had an opportunity, through debate, through question period, to be aware of the six months of negotiation that have taken place between our government and a number of teachers' unions across this province. We have had some success. Obviously, the one that comes to mind is the OECTA agreement with the English Catholic teachers. We've had an agreement with that union which represents franco-phone teachers, as well as a smaller union that deals with some of the support staff around issues—psychologists and individuals like that.

Although we have made some progress, and at the same time we've seen boards who have settled with these

unions, it has by no means been universal. Certainly, as school begins—today, of course, being the first day of school—there is a concern about how we move forward. Will we see disruptions? Can parents have the type of certainty that they want, as their children go off to school?

There's also a fiscal reality. The fact is that on September 1 of this year, due to the nature of contracts that have been negotiated in the past, we're going to see what's called a rollover, where, in the absence of contracts, certain increases in pay will come forth, and there's going to be a cost ultimately to the treasury of literally hundreds of millions of dollars—\$473 million, to be exact. So we've had to move with some degree of speed on this. Although the bill has a retroactive component to it, we have committed to have the bill passed as close to September 1 as possible.

Last week, as I say, we had over eight hours of debate on second reading. There was an attempt to move the bill through by unanimous consent. We had evening sittings. Now we are taking the next step, in terms of time allocation.

I close, though, by saying that we do none of this with a great deal of enthusiasm. We respect collective bargaining in this province. We would like to have seen agreements with all the teachers' unions. We would like to not have to bring forward this legislation. We would like, too, that the legislation could pass through the usual course.

But there is urgency that's associated with this. I think all of us recognize, with school having started and the clock ticking, that we need to set out a path for this piece of legislation, and that's what this motion does. I have brought it forward today, as I say, with a great deal of consideration. I realize the seriousness of a time allocation motion, but I think it matches the seriousness which we find in our education system.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'm pleased to join in the debate on Bill 115. I have a somewhat unique perspective on this bill because, to the best of my knowledge, I am the only MPP who is a paid-up member of one of the teacher federations. I'm the only MPP who can speak first-hand about the challenges teachers face in the classroom, about the increased complexity of education, of the need to consistently update and innovate, not only to reflect the changing technology in the world around us but to ensure that our students are exposed to the most thoughtful and thorough curriculum and the most advanced teaching technologies. That is the only way to ensure our youth are prepared for the challenges facing the highly skilled jobs of the 21st century and to guarantee their work lives will be as productive as those of the generations which came before them.

I was elected with an extremely positive view of the potential of this great province. I come from the lovely community of Trent Hills, an exceptionally beautiful place, and I encourage each and every member here to

visit Trent Hills. It's blessed with almost all the amenities found in the larger urban centre, while still having the strong sense of community that is most often found in small towns and rural Ontario.

1540

Since coming to Queen's Park, it saddens me to say I have seen far too much time in this chamber devoted to frivolous and juvenile attempts to play politics. As MPPs, I still believe we should be devoting our time and talents to finding solutions to the very real impediments preventing our province and its people and businesses from reaching their full potential. This week, we have seen more examples of game-playing, starting with this bill before us this evening.

When the government signed the last collective agreement two years ago, they obviously knew the exact date on which it would end. For the past two years, this Liberal government has said it has recognized that Ontario is in dire financial straits. However, despite that, they have continued to overspend in just about every area and continued to drive up our provincial debt. Ignoring payroll expenses would suggest a government that truly did not care about the long-term financial health of this province.

Already, interest costs on the provincial debt exceed \$10 billion a year, and that grows by another \$1 billion each and every year. If debt service were a ministry, it would now be the third-largest ministry in the province of Ontario after only health care and education, and before all 22 other ministries, including transportation, social services, infrastructure and community safety.

What could \$10 billion buy? You could buy 2,000 MRI machines every year. You could quadruple disability payments to Ontarians who, through no fault of their own, cannot work. You could convert every single locomotive, bus, truck and car owned by the government and every single government building so they ran on hydrogen, providing global leadership in the race to a cleaner environment. In short, you could do any number of things that would add real value to the lives of Ontarians and ensure a more productive and healthier economy here in Ontario.

Rather than reflect on these serious statistics and making sure that they adopted a comprehensive plan to control all aspects of their spending back in the spring when they went through the budget process, the government chose to wait until the last minute to deal with the billions of dollars of spending in our schools. Based on their actions, they only realized a couple of weeks ago that the teacher contracts would expire on August 31. What a disappointment, not only to the hard-working teachers who have been kept in limbo waiting for the government to act, but to the school board trustees who have been cut out of their role as negotiators of contracts with their own teachers, and most of all, an insult and unnecessary cause for concern to literally millions of parents who didn't know whether the school year would begin on time.

How ironic that the education Premier has now created a crisis in our education system that vastly exceeds any

issue he ever critiqued when the PC government was in office. At least the PCs could honestly claim they were cleaning up the mess of Bob Rae and the NDP government. Premier Dalton McGuinty has only himself to blame for the current situation in our schools. He thought the teachers were puppets who could dance to his tune, no matter what he did to their collective agreements. I think it has come as a surprise that my former colleagues weren't that weak-willed.

So the Premier has deliberately waited until the last minute. He has deliberately created this sense of outrage within the education community and deliberately upset the broader public. On this issue, the public are way ahead of the government and the media. They're mad. They know when they are being used as by-election pawns. But they won't be fooled—not this time.

The government has created a crisis, but I want to make it very clear to the parents and students in Northumberland-Quinte West and across all of Ontario that our party isn't going to play games. We aren't going to hold up passage of this bill. We want teachers and parents to be able to focus on the only thing that they should be thinking about at this time of the year: Getting our kids into the classrooms. Our bottom line was and is: We will do whatever it takes to ensure that there are no interruptions to the school year.

That's why we're willing to step in and save the self-proclaimed education Premier from the fix he's gotten himself into. This bill is the first tangible proof that the government might actually finally be willing to take the first steps needed to get spending under control. During the election last fall, our party called for a two-year public sector wage freeze for all recipients of provincial funding, and this bill enacts that freeze, at least on teachers. This is an important first step, but it is far from the solution to the financial woes that this province faces. In fact, this bill and the Liberal treatment of teachers single out just one group and don't enact a blanket freeze that would cover all provincial funding recipients and which would save \$2 billion a year. Rather than be fair, rather than ensure that the same provisions cover all provincial recipients, this government has chosen to attack selective targets while leaving other public sector unions alone.

Ontarians have to wonder why. First, it was the doctors. They willingly agreed to the same two-year freeze we had proposed, but that wasn't good enough for the Liberals. They had to whack the doctors with another \$1 billion worth of cuts, leaving many doctors contemplating moving out of the province or retiring. That doesn't exactly improve the status of health care here in Ontario.

What about the horse racing industry—60,000 workers engaged in a practice that has been a mainstay of rural Ontario for more than a century, an industry that will be snuffed out, perhaps completely, according to the expert panel appointed by this government? Despite the government's spin, the slots-at-racetracks partnership is just that: a partnership, not a subsidy. The racetracks generate

over \$1.1 billion in revenue for the province, and that's not counting the money that's kept by the tracks, the horse racers and the host municipalities.

Let me put that into perspective so that all Ontarians can truly appreciate exactly how much the rest of Ontario will suffer as a result of the Liberal decision to kill the horse racing industry. The \$1.1 billion generated by race-tracks across the province is more money than this government will give to the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. So the next time you hear about a grant to stimulate jobs, or an investment in a new and promising technology, or funding to promote tourism in Ontario, or sports in Ontario or the arts in Ontario, remember that every one of those dollars came from the racetrack. Remember as well that after April 1, either the government will have to slash services by \$1.1 billion or else it will have to increase taxes to make up for the loss of money from the racetracks.

Oh, that's right. For those who don't care about the financial future of the province, there is a third Liberal option, and that is to increase the provincial debt by another \$1.1 billion every year. The government could have solved all their problems back in the spring, but instead of starting negotiations in a timely fashion, the government has created this crisis, and it's up to all of us to solve their problems.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my colleague the member from Timmins-James Bay will be joining us shortly and will be sharing my time with me.

Speaker, as you are well aware, the urgency of this matter is directly tied to a by-election vote that is happening this Thursday in Kitchener-Waterloo. That is the urgency of the matter before us today. If this government had felt that there was an urgent issue regarding our schools that had to be addressed, based on the arguments they've made before, they could have come before this Legislature, frankly, in the spring with legislation, saying, "We need to impose this. We need to make sure that these are the contract conditions that we're going to put in place regarding our schools." But that didn't happen. No. When a by-election call came forward, almost at the same time we had a Premier talking about the need for legislation to make sure that schools opened at the beginning of the school year.

I point out to you, Speaker—and I had a chance to ask the Premier about this this morning—that this law has not passed. This law is still under debate, and the schools are open today; the children are in those classrooms and the teachers are teaching in them.

Why are we debating today? Why were we debating last week? So that in the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo, Dalton McGuinty and his party could go door to door, saying, "There's a crisis, and we will save you from that crisis." That is the urgency. That is the heart of the

matter. You can't understand the timing, the issue, without being aware of that very real fact.

This Premier decided that he needed a crisis in order to win an election, so parents and their children around this province have been subjected to messages since midsummer that school wouldn't open on time or that school would be disrupted, when, again, the heart of this is the incredible quest—desperation—to secure a majority government for Dalton McGuinty in this province. Students are not being put first. Students, parents and schools are not being put first. They are being used simply as props in a campaign being fought with the hope of securing a majority for Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal Party.

What we're dealing with opens a door on the personality, on the character, of the Premier of this province. Now, we've had a chance to look through that door before. It has come up in debate—the decision of this government twice to make significant decisions around energy investments that had everything to do with saving seats rather than the understanding of this government when it came to what they felt was needed for this province's energy infrastructure.

In Oakville and in Mississauga, decisions were made to shut down contracts for gas-fired power plants. Those decisions were driven by politics, not by analysis of energy need. That opportunism, that willingness to spend public money, to play with public emotion, is something that is becoming more and more apparent to the people of Ontario, and this bill and this approach illustrate it more clearly than just about anything else we've seen.

We have to ask ourselves: Is it ethical, is it moral to frighten parents, to unsettle students by saying that there's a crisis? "Your schools will not open at the beginning of the year." Is it ethical to do that simply for crass political gain? I would argue, and my guess is that parents across this province would agree, that it is not ethical, that it is not moral. But that, Speaker, is what we see.

If this government had felt a greater sense of urgency, this House could have been called back at the beginning of August. This House could have been called back a week earlier than it was called back. Last week, every debate session of every day could have been allocated to this debate and we would have been put in a position where this government could have moved closure then, but it didn't do that. This debate is being stretched out so that this matter is in the public eye right through the last two weeks of the by-election in Kitchener-Waterloo. Don't think any differently.

If you're in Kitchener-Waterloo, if you're anywhere in this province and you're trying to figure out what's going on, if you're concerned that school will be disrupted—because you know that school has started today, and this bill didn't make a difference one way or the other, not one whit of difference—be aware that this is all being driven by that one by-election.

Speaker, if this government truly believed that it was critical to put students first, then it would have ap-

proached many key education decisions in a very different way.

I've talked to students in our schools, in our high schools, who are using textbooks that, as they said to me, are older than they are. If you talk to the people in this province who publish those textbooks, if you look at the government statistics that they provide you with, you can see that it takes 10 to 20 years for a newly approved textbook to get to all students. In science, things move very quickly. A 20-year-old textbook is an interesting antique and can be good to hold down documents in a windy room, but it does not constitute current scientific thinking, even by the government's standards. I've talked to students in science rooms where the only person in the room who has a current textbook is the teacher and everyone else has textbooks that, as I've said, Speaker, are older than they are. Is that putting students first? Is that making sure they have a 21st-century education for the challenges of our times? Absolutely not.

In this, the urgency is driven by political gain on the part of the Premier, not urgency to make sure that students are our highest priority.

Speaker, when I talked about this bill last week, I pointed out again that in a variety of jurisdictions in this province there are caps on the number of students who can be assessed for special-needs problems, even if teachers are very certain that those students need the assessment and need the help. There are caps as a way of containing the expense on those students. What that means for those young people is, they're simply abandoned, set aside. Their pressing needs are not attended to. That means they will live much harder lives.

My colleague the member from Timmins—James Bay will speak in a minute, but I want to say that this is one of the more cynical pieces of legislation that we've dealt with in our time in this Legislature. It is an extraordinary document that I hope will be the source of the downfall for this government.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, I'd like to begin with a recounting of a little conversation I had yesterday while I was out assisting a colleague of mine who is engaged in a little enterprise that needs some people to go door to door in the municipalities of Kitchener and Waterloo. I got to a house, and the lady answered the door. We had a few pleasantries. She said, "You know, I'm a teacher." I said, "Okay, talk to me." We had a very cordial conversation for several minutes. I personally liked the outcome of the conversation, but at the end of it, she said, "Tomorrow I'm going back into my class. Tomorrow I'm going to face my students, and what I'd really like to see tomorrow is, let's just get on with it."

Today we're talking about a time allocation motion in support of Bill 115, which is called the Putting Students First Act—because that, of course, was what she wanted to do—and it's time to just get on with it. We're going to get on with it because today is the first day of school.

We'll get on with it because children all over Ontario, when they woke up this morning, had their outfits picked out, and their moms had their lunches packed, and they're all meeting their new teachers. They are renewing their acquaintances and they are making new friends.

Now, this legislation, if passed, will give students and families the certainty that they need that school will continue uninterrupted. We know we need that because teacher and support staff contracts all expired on August 31. No one was surprised by that. We began the discussions with the various partners way back when the weather was still cold and the snow was still on the ground—what little snow we had. The province worked with many of our partners for almost six months to establish a new, sustainable education funding framework.

In July, Ontario signed an agreement with OECTA, which is the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. This agreement represents a road map that balances the need for this province to reach its fiscal targets while protecting Ontario's investments in full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes, and a superior classroom experience. That agreement is reflected in the Putting Students First Act. It's a fair and a balanced approach. It's going to benefit Ontario's youngest teachers. It will help preserve 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs.

Teachers at more than half of Ontario boards now have signed agreements with the province. Now we need to do our part. Now we need to get on with it, to get the rest of the teacher federations and boards to just do their part.

Partners like OECTA, partners like the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, or AEFO, and the Association of Professional Student Services Personnel engaged in a constructive dialogue and, after a lengthy period of time at the bargaining table, signed agreements that served the best interests not merely of the province, but also of their members. And just last week, education assistants also signed on to this particular contractual road map. Some 3,000 education assistants from the Halton District Educational Assistants Association, the Dufferin-Peel Educational Resource Workers' Association, the Educational Assistants Association of the Waterloo Region District School Board, and support staff represented by the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens all signed this agreement, which meets the province's fiscal targets while protecting the classroom experience and also the gains that we have made together in education.

The proposed Putting Students First Act recognizes that these are challenging economic times. The proposed legislation also acknowledges that we've accomplished so much in education since this government came to office in 2003 and we cannot put those gains at risk.

The bill, which is based on more than 300 hours of negotiating with the English Catholic teachers' association, provides for some of the following: 0% salary increases in 2012-13 and 2013-14; and a 0.5% pay cut in the form of one unpaid professional development day in

the second year of the contract so that younger, lower-paid support staff are able to continue to move through the experience grid. Let's just repeat that for some of the younger teachers: That particular clause allows you to continue to move through the experience grid.

It includes the elimination of the current retirement gratuity for the payment of unused sick days that was responsible for an unfunded \$1.7-billion liability to school boards, and it provides for a restructured short-term sick leave plan that would include up to 10 sick days. This sick leave plan would benefit younger support staff by providing income protection for serious illnesses.

One of the things I've heard as I've been walking in the sunshine out in the Kitchener and Waterloo neighbourhoods is: How many people in the private sector who saw their salary cut and watched their pensions melt away would have liked to have a choice of an option like this? This is going to save the province \$250 million in 2012-13, growing to a savings of \$540 million in 2013-14. In addition, the province would achieve one-time savings of \$1.4 billion with the elimination of banked sick days. This adds up, in aggregate, to more than \$2 billion in savings.

In the past, class sizes have had to go up to pay for grid movement for teachers. We don't think that's just. In 2003, only 31% of junior kindergarten to grade 3 classes had 20 students or less. Now, 91% of junior kindergarten to grade 3 classes have 20 students or less. Under the OECTA memorandum of understanding and the Putting Students First Act, we get to preserve these smaller class sizes.

We also get to recognize younger teachers by allowing them to continue to be recognized for their qualifications and for their investment in their career. Partial grid movement will be paid for by all teachers taking that 1.5% pay cut in the form of three unpaid professional development days.

Our government has been a strong supporter of younger teachers. This legislation includes a restructured short-term sick leave plan that would benefit younger teachers. It would include up to 10 sick days and also include up to 120 days for more serious illnesses.

Previously, teachers had to use their sick days for maternity leave or for serious illness. Let's say that again. Previously, teachers had to use their sick days for maternity leave or for serious illnesses. Younger teachers who didn't have banked sick days were simply not supported. The new sick leave plan would support new teachers by providing income protection for serious illness and improved maternity leave provisions.

The agreement also introduces fair hiring practices to the education sector. Many of us, as MPPs, have been visited by our friends and by teachers who have said, "You know, I've completed teachers' college." Maybe they've been on supply teaching or occasional teaching lists for months or even years, and they're not sure of what the process is to be hired on a permanent basis, because that's their goal; they'd like to be full-time, permanent teachers. The memorandum of understanding

sets out fair hiring rules that will bring transparency and accountability for teacher hiring processes and make them consistent all the way across the province. Not one rule in this board, another rule in that board and different rules in another board; consistent across the province.

While management will still make the ultimate decision about whom to hire, their role comes with a responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood—understood—by all.

We also recognize the impact on young teachers of retired teachers who return as substitutes. We've worked with the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. As of this September, retired teachers will be limited to a maximum of 50 days per year, down from 95. This opens up supply days in classrooms for younger professionals, younger teachers; exactly what the younger teachers have asked.

1610

Speaker, I would urge my colleagues from all parties to work together, because a year ago that's what people asked us to do. They sent us here in this balanced House and said, "You are here to work together. Remember who you're there to help." We're here to work for all Ontarians, and they expect us to work together, so I urge my colleagues from all parties to work together to pass this important piece of legislation as soon as possible.

First and foremost, the Putting Students First Act protects the gains that Ontario has made in education, after the previous government left it in disarray.

The proposed legislation works within the fiscal parameters set out in the 2012 budget. In other words, it keeps our budget deficit going the way it should—down—and it's based on hundreds of hours of collective bargaining. This is what people sent us here to do.

The legislation also provides much-needed support to a very important group of people, and that's younger teachers.

This legislation should pass as soon as possible to give families, to give teachers and to give all Ontarians the certainty that they need. As the teacher I spoke with in Waterloo said to me, it is indeed time to just get on with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to comment on the time allocation motion before us today. This motion deals specifically with Bill 115—

Interjection.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Everybody's a little ornery today—the Putting Students First Act, which is, of course, the reason we are all supposed to be here this week and last week.

A little over two weeks ago, the government House leader advised the Speaker that the McGuinty Liberals would recall the Legislature last Monday, on August 27. The government House leader explained that the government had to do this so that it could introduce and pass the Putting Students First Act. In a statement to the press on August 20, the government House leader said, "We're bringing the Legislature back early so that students and

parents have the certainty of knowing that their school year will not be disrupted"—a noble goal, Speaker, to be sure, one that my colleagues and I in the Progressive Conservative caucus agreed with.

The government House leader went on to warn of the rollover of teachers' contracts, arguing that this was why it was imperative to pass the Putting Students First Act as quickly as possible. Again, the House leader said, "In less than two weeks, teachers' contracts will expire and roll over, leading to automatic increases in wages of up to 5.5% and two million more bankable sick days that can be cashed out at retirement. Taxpayers can't afford that," he said—interesting observation, and once again, the PC caucus and I agree.

In fact, Speaker, it was the Premier and the government that adamantly voted against Bill 92, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector, over three months ago, in May. Bill 92, tabled by the MPP for Elgin–Middlesex–London, would have solved the rollover problem months ago, but no matter.

As our leader, Tim Hudak, said, we in the PC caucus are willing to take half a loaf and allow Bill 115 to pass. Our party committed to Bill 115's passage, because we've been warning the Premier and his government since the last election, almost a full year ago, that a wage freeze was needed to get Ontario's finances under control. Just as importantly, we in the PC caucus agreed with the principle that MPPs should come back to Queen's Park early to ensure that parents and students could enter the school year with certainty and sustainability.

So far, there has been eight hours and 32 minutes of debate on Bill 115, and lo and behold, that dreaded rollover day, September 1, has come and gone. Of course, today is the first day of school. For all of the government's declarations of providing stability for the start of the school year and avoiding the rollover on September 1, they failed on both fronts.

I suppose, Speaker, the government House leader wasn't far off when he said that legislation moves through a minority Parliament as slow as molasses. Certainly, when it comes to Bill 115, the responsibility for this lack of movement falls squarely on the government. Ultimately, Speaker, eight hours and 32 minutes of debate is long enough on Bill 115. We need to get this bill passed. Let's get it done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to join the debate on the time allocation motion for Bill 115.

I wanted to talk a little bit about how the grid actually works, because we seem to spend a lot of time talking about collective agreements that roll over, and grids and movement on the grid, and I'm sure it's a little bit like some foreign language to people who are listening. I used to be a school board trustee. I spent 15 years as a school board trustee, so I've spent a lot of time doing collective bargaining.

Teacher salaries are actually based on two things. They're based, first of all, on experience. We have

extraordinarily highly qualified teachers here in Ontario. When a teacher comes in now to the profession, they have two degrees, typically. They have an undergraduate degree, and they have a bachelor of education in addition to that. But depending on the precise nature of their qualifications, they might end up in a different category. The lowest-paid category would be people who have a three-year general degree. The highest of the four categories would be people who have a very specialized honours degree, a four-year degree. Depending on that education, they go in different categories.

One of the things that actually is quite interesting is: Other people envy our teachers. I remember, when I was president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, being at a meeting down in the US, actually, during the Harris years, and people in the US were talking about, "How do we get better-qualified teachers?" Do you know what the advice was? The advice in the States was to come to Ontario faculties of education, where everybody was mad at the government, and hire Ontario teachers, because they were the best-qualified teachers in North America. Anyway, I digress.

Depending on how highly qualified you are, that helps determine your salary. So if you start with the lower end of the qualifications—I'm picking up something here from last year's grid in my own board—about \$46,700 would be the starting salary. If you're at the higher end of qualification, the starting salary is \$53,600.

The other thing that is relevant is your experience. Depending on how many years of experience you have, you step up the grid. If you're at that higher end of experience—again, looking at the grid in my own particular board for one of the groups—you would actually move up to about \$94,600 over a period of about 11 years. It's actually nailed right down in a chart, who moves how much each year, based on qualifications and experience.

What's interesting about collective agreements, and this is universal for teacher collective agreements in Ontario, is that on September 1, your experience is counted. If you're on the grid—that is, you haven't already got enough experience that you're at the top—they roll over, and the teacher rolls up the grid, hence this whole discussion about rolling over and the urgency of making sure that boards aren't trapped in having to pay salary increases.

About 40% of the teachers in Ontario are on the grid. Typically, that increase amounts to, on average, about 5% a year. As of starting teaching today, about 40% of the teachers in Ontario get about a 5% salary increase. That's why it's very urgent that we figure out how to sort this out and get on with passing this bill.

One of the things that, again, not everybody would realize is that the way the grants for student needs—the GSN—work is, in fact, the Ministry of Education actually counts how many teachers are at each level of qualification and how many teachers are at each level of experience, and each board's grants are individualized as to where people are on the grid.

1620

Here's where things get interesting, because the third party has said on a number of occasions that I've heard that all the teachers have agreed to have a freeze. Their definition is, they've agreed to a freeze of the grid; that is, those numbers I just quoted aren't going to get bigger. It wouldn't stop people from moving up—40% of the teachers—and getting about a 5% salary increase.

When we said "freeze," we actually meant, "Your compensation is frozen." A freeze is a salary freeze, which is what I think most of the public anticipated—that a freeze is a salary freeze, because that's what we meant. This year's grants to school boards did not include that calculation of where people are on the grid and the allowance for that 40% of people getting a 5% increase. So the school boards actually don't have the money to pay the salary increases that are required as of September 1. Hence, we need to get this legislation done quickly.

Interjections.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: The people who are nattering away at me over here are absolutely right that there is a problem with the way the legislation works around school board collective bargaining—and you'd have to go back to Bill Davis and Margaret Wilson to figure it out, but it became particularly problematic when school boards lost the right to tax.

School board bargaining, in law, is done between local boards and actually the provincial teachers' union, not legally the local. The government has nothing to do with it. But back when school boards lost their taxation rights, we actually agreed that this is a broken system. What we have done is put in an informal system that says that everybody will come together with the provincial government, figure out a framework agreement and then you're going to have to negotiate the details locally, which worked well as long as the government was negotiating increases. This year when we said that we need to take a pause, we need to hit the pause button, people just said, "Well, if that's what you want, we'll walk away from the provincial discussion." Therein lies the problem. That's why we're here. We need to get on with the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for—I want to say "Cornwall," but that's not—

Mr. Steve Clark: Stormont-Dundas.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry; thank you.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I commend our education critic from Nepean-Carleton, who has spent hours and hours trying to get to the bottom of it and trying to provide some advice to a government that is refusing to listen to the opposition or the people in the province.

It's interesting to see the urgency of this bill. My wife, Margie, and my daughter, Chelsea, are both in the classroom today, so I've been somewhat involved over the last few months in a lot of discussion and, as you can imagine, over the last eight years in the teaching industry. At no time have I ever heard from them or their unions in

the last few weeks that they weren't going to be back in the classroom today.

I'm just wondering where this crisis is coming from. Is this just another made-up crisis to give the impression of somebody that has finally gotten tough and is going to deal with some of the problems in this province? It just so happens to be timed with two by-elections that are coming up in Kitchener-Waterloo and in Vaughan. It's just an interesting observation, that you really wonder about a Premier that seems to be trying to pick a loser and, all of a sudden, trying to beat them up, when he has actually had such a problem over the last nine years: He's doubled our debt, ran away with our deficit, which has really caused this problem. That's what's upsetting my family at home: the fact that they're being played for the villains in this group.

I seem to remember a year ago a Premier that was bragging about a contract that they were able to put in place "a fair contract," I think were the words. All of a sudden, this contract is the worst thing that could have ever come in place for the province of Ontario. I just wonder: Contracts usually take two parties to sign, and one of the parties is now pointing fingers at the other. And it's interesting that with over 4,000 public sector contracts, why are we picking on one? Just recently, the power workers of the province received a 3% increase, such a serious financial problem that we didn't have to address it there. We also had bonuses given out to 98% of public service managers and executives. It's funny that there wasn't a problem when that happened. This government is not interested in it. So is attacking the teachers really solving the problem?

There was never any indication that they weren't going back to work come today, and I guess we can see from the news articles and talking to my constituents that it was not a problem and in fact they are there, just as everybody knew they would be. It's the reason my leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for an across-the-board wage freeze, something that really addresses the problem. Not picking winners and losers; it's addressing the problem right across the public sector, a group that has benefited with very healthy increases over the last number of years—actually, the last nine years—with this government, as a way, I guess, to somewhat encourage them to possibly contribute to their election campaigns.

But next week I'll be putting forth a motion in this House that will allow this government to get tough. It's a motion that is calling for this across-the-board public wage freeze. What it will do is stop things happening like we've seen in the case of bonuses going to managers. Maybe this government didn't know what was going on. Maybe they were just unaware. Maybe they were asleep at the switch. But this will allow them to put in legislation that will stop that. They no longer have to be watching what's going on. It will happen. I think that's what we need, because obviously there's a severe lack of oversight in this province today, and we need to bring that back.

It's time to make the tough decisions necessary to put Ontario back, and look after some of the issues that the

people of Ontario are really worried about, such as their health care, their pensions, their social safety net and making our province competitive again. Every time we turn around, we hear of another company—businesses—leaving. In my own riding in 2005 and 2006, we lost over 3,000 manufacturing jobs, and that's not a big riding. It's a riding of about 95,000 or 100,000 people. Across the province, that was a huge issue, because it's not competitive in Ontario anymore. And it's little wonder when we look at some of the issues that this government has put together.

It's time also to stop the political spin and the sound-good legislation that's simply designed to put the McGuinty government first before the people of this great province, legislation and actions such as the Green Energy Act, which has made this province's electricity or energy unaffordable. We're not only paying our competitors in this world to take our electricity essentially free; we've made it so our residents and businesses can no longer afford it. It's adding billions of dollars a year to the cost of electricity.

The cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga power plants that this government is refusing to fully disclose—simply seat savers, again putting themselves ahead of the people of Ontario—is estimated to be well over \$2 billion.

Cancellation of the slots at racetracks will result in losing over \$1 billion in revenue a year. When this government has such a spending problem—it's looking at taxing with every chance it gets—why is it closing its eyes to this revenue that it's been using and providing service to the people of Ontario through helping health care and all the services that we really have grown to need? Now we're looking at 60,000 jobs being lost and the pending slaughter of over 12,000 horses. I'm sure that when that hits the news, it will be somebody else's fault; somebody in the industry should have been paying for these horses, even though they've gone bankrupt.

The refusal to get serious in getting to the bottom of Ornge is another example. If they really wanted to fix this system—I heard today that they're talking about delaying the bill. Well, call the bill. But that doesn't address what was wrong. I mean, the only way to find out what was wrong is to get serious and look at it. We shouldn't be worried about what information is going to turn up. That's just another sign of trying to hide what's going on there. We've asked the Premier to show up and actually give some time to the committee. But as we see again, there's no time for things like that. I think it's time that this government get on with the things that the people of Ontario are looking at and are expecting from a government of Ontario that used to be a leader in this country.

1630

These are just some of the examples we see of this government looking out for itself and not for the people. So let's stop trying to create a new crisis, this new crisis we see where the teachers would not be in school; we'd see students losing time. They've created enough crises

over their eight years. They have lots to address. They don't need a new one. Again, it's another crisis to show that we can get tough against a small group of people, but we can't afford to get tough and make decisions required on the broader sector—the sector that's enjoyed huge increases over the last years where the private sector has not had that same benefit.

No government has ever divided this province as this Liberal government. If you look at the map of Ontario, it really is sad to look at how the ridings are laid out. It's just a showing that this legislation is really geared towards further dividing the province, looking at what an issue they can get to get, finally, power that would allow them to again not address the issues, not have to listen to the people of Ontario.

I think that it's time that we move ahead. We have an agreement here that is such a bad agreement. He's been bragging for years about how he's pulled education together, how he's increased spending. There's not a group in this province that would refuse to take money if you show up and actually offer them more than they're asking for.

I think this government has to sit down, has to start talking and listening to its people, and it's time to make some of the tough decisions and show some leadership.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise today in the Legislature to speak to the reasons this time allocation bill is so important, the time allocation motion debate on Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, 2012.

I want to start by looking at what has happened over the last almost four years. The whole Western world is reeling from the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Our Canadian dollar, in relation to our biggest trading partner, has increased in value by 50%. Our largest trading partner is in terrible economic shape, and they take about 70% of our exports. The last budget clearly showed that Ontario and Canada are in a better economic situation than most of the rest of the Western world, but still the future strength of our province depends on tough decisions we make today.

Ontario has created over half the jobs in Canada since the 2009 low, and we are now above the level of jobs we were before the major recession. Our government has created the necessary conditions for moving forward. We now must deal with the deficit, and our plan takes that down to a balanced budget in 2017-18.

One part of that is to have each of us play our part. As MPPs in this House, our salaries have been frozen for two years and will continue to be frozen for another three years, so we will be doing what is necessary to take a pause on salaries in the public sector. These are difficult times, and we must all come to the aid of our province.

When I was in business for 35 years, as owners of the business we would enjoy the good years, and when times were not as good, we would take less from our business. As a result, I was pleased to maintain our company

strong for 35 years. We employed over 100 people at our peak and grossed over \$14 million a year.

The province is now in a tough position. It is no different today with the province. Teachers have enjoyed good years and they deserve the good contracts that they have negotiated. They have done an excellent job of working with our government and achieving higher achievement rates, higher graduation rates. Over 100,000 more high school kids graduated under our system than would have with the old graduation rates.

Our schools are now the envy of the world. I heard criticism of our schools, but if you're number one, that's pretty good. That's thanks to the teachers and thanks to the policies of our government.

But as I and my fellow owners in business did, teachers must be team players with the rest of Ontarians and come to the table. I know that most teachers want to be team players. No one likes a legislated solution to this impasse, but over 50,000 other teachers have stayed at the table and agreed to do their part.

An automatic contract rollover occurred on September 1, just three days ago. This rollover will increase pay and grant more bankable sick days, at a cost of \$473 million this year.

Our legislation also maintains stability in our schools by preventing any labour disruptions in the next two years. We could have followed the Drummond report and fired 10,000 of our young teachers and 10,000 of our education support workers, and got rid of full-day kindergarten and smaller class sizes, but we decided that our children were too important for that action.

My own grandchild Logan has just finished two years of full-day kindergarten and starts grade 1, while my second grandchild, Keegan, starts full-day kindergarten today. Logan is now bilingual after two years in full-day kindergarten. He loves school. Keegan could not wait for his bus to pick him up this morning to follow in his brother's footsteps.

Our teachers have done a great job of improving their skills, giving us better achievements for our children and making our education results the envy of most of the world. We have great schools and great teachers in Ottawa-Orléans.

No one likes to see legislated settlements, but negotiations started last February and the teachers' union only stayed at the negotiating table one hour. Other unions negotiated, and after 300 hours of tough negotiations, an agreement was reached.

In order to meet the financial objectives of a balanced budget, we need fair, across-the-board treatment with all teachers and all public servants. We must reach agreement with all Ontarians to share equally in bringing our province back to a balanced budget in the next five years. Unfortunately, in order to make sure the pain is equally divided, we have to proceed with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a piece of legislation that's very important.

We're staring down the barrel of a \$411.4-billion debt in a couple of years and a \$30.2-billion deficit in a couple of years. At minimum, this is a bit of a start, although it does fall well short of a goal, as our leader describes. He uses terms like "half loaf." I could throw in "half-baked."

I know I had a meeting with my—I actually talked with both school boards down my way, the public board and the Roman Catholic board, and they have some concerns, most importantly the ever-increasing cost of compensation over the last several years.

We have a government that stalled until the 11th hour. That has left parents with some angst, some uncertainty with respect to what may be happening in the next few weeks. Here we are with time allocation and the effort to ram this through at a time when we're normally not sitting.

But it's a tentative step; it's a step towards a path that we've been encouraging for well over a year, and going on nine years, I should say, Speaker—nine years of essentially a program that handed our education system over to the trade union movement, rather than leaving it in the hands of parents and school boards. None of us wants to derail the school year or let the unions off the hook. We sincerely want to ensure that the kids are in school today, that they remain in school and things carry on, but there are some problems to deal with.

The arrangement with the Roman Catholic union in many ways put a lid on a boiling pot of water. It deals with just one part of the public sector and really avoids any meaningful or structural change that would be required, but it's at least an acknowledgement of the fiscal crisis that is looming.

Now the task is to review the draft legislation carefully. There will be loopholes; for example, we've seen the stark evidence that the government's so-called wage freeze is not really a wage freeze. The third party makes mention of bonuses handed out to 98% of management in the public sector. That seems to be simply for just showing up. So there are some trap doors out there. We'll be vigilant. We'll be looking at this before we pass final judgment, and I think that's very important, especially given some legislation that's clearly being rushed through.

Thank you for the opportunity, Speaker, and I'll defer to the honourable member next.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member from Mississauga-Streetsville—no?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mississauga-Brampton South. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to enter into debate on time allocation on Bill 115. As a former teacher, I fully understand the important role teachers play in the lives of students. Teachers help shape and mould the future of our young learners.

This bill is all about keeping taxpayer dollars in the classroom. That investment in the classroom will rise in value over time, and we will have a highly skilled and competitive workforce in this ever-changing world and in this ever-competing world.

This bill is all about the confidence parents should have that their students will be in the classroom. This summer, I had the opportunity to attend several community events and spoke to many parents, and they expressed their concerns about the reopening of schools, and I fully understand their concern. I'm very proud of the progress our government and teachers have made together, and we do not want to lose it. The only way we can retain that progress is that we hit the pause button together.

And everyone must understand the reality this province is facing: The reality is a \$15-billion deficit, caused by a global recession. We are all in it together, and we all must do our part. If this legislation is passed, we will save \$473 million, and we need that money for programs like full-day kindergarten, expanding home care for our seniors and for our universal health care.

Madam Speaker, it is disappointing that New Democrats have chosen teacher pay hikes, not the students and Ontario families. Whenever they stand in the House, they often talk about Ontario families and children. I fail to understand what made them change that gear. I urge all members of this House to support Bill 115.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Nipissing-Pembroke-Renfrew—Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A great riding no matter what order you put the names in, Speaker. Thank you very much.

Look, we're debating a time allocation motion here this afternoon in the House with respect to Bill 115, and I know my colleague there across the way from Ottawa—Orléans likes to call it—they originally called it the Putting Students First Act or something, but that didn't fly very well. It was just too cute by half, so it is called An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. But he's still thinking of a carbon tax, so he's a little behind the times on the name of the bill.

Anyway, we're going to support this time allocation motion because we agreed to do so and we want to move this legislation as expeditiously as possible. But something that irks me, and I know it irks members on this side of the House, is the way that the Premier positioned this, the way that he sold it. Out in the public domain, back in August and earlier than that even, but certainly through the month of August, he said, "We have to pass this new legislation before September 1; otherwise, the contracts are going to have automatic rollover provisions and result in increases of up to 5.5%." Well, we know that that assertion was patently false. We're here on September 4. The bill hasn't been passed. In fact, as I've said to people, there is no way on God's green earth that we're going to show up here on August 27 and have a bill passed in this Legislature by September 1. First of all, you can't debate it the same day that you table it. So the time constraints don't allow for it. In fact, we haven't even completed second reading. We've got a time allocation motion, and that's going to take care of second reading, committee and third reading, and we're looking at a bill that is likely to be passed on September 11.

Why couldn't the Premier just be honest in the first place? Why couldn't he have just told the truth right from the start and said, "We want to pass the bill, but let's not falsely create a crisis and pretend that there's an actual timing issue that says we must pass this legislation by September 1"? Because we know that's not the case or we wouldn't be here debating this time allocation motion on September 4.

It's just as I said about that Liberal principle soup. You just throw in a lot of stuff that's left over in the fridge and you get what you get, and every time you get it it's different, because whatever suits their case, whatever suits their purposes, that's what they'll try to sell you.

I have a question. I'm not pretending to be an expert on negotiating contracts or labour law or anything like this, but where I come from, when a contract expires, it expires, and you work without a contract until such time as a new contract is signed, and then the terms of the new contract are implemented retroactively. So who are the geniuses that negotiated a contract that would roll over automatically after it expired?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But retroactivity is not always automatic in the agreement.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's part of the negotiations.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, but they're not all retroactive.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Fine. I know you're going to have a chance to speak, and you can respond to it.

What I'm saying is, where does this automatic rollover come from? If on August 31 contracts expired, that's what they should have done. Who negotiated those agreements in the first place that would have automatic rollover provisions, knowing full well that you weren't going to have a new contract negotiated before August 31?

In every other sector, you would work without an agreement until such time as a new agreement was signed, and then you would negotiate as to when those terms came into effect.

So it was a pretty poor job, the negotiations that went on in 2008. They were actually the genesis of the mess, because that created the mess that you have here today, again another one of your own creating.

It brings us back to the crux of the matter, and that is the manufacturing of a crisis to try to what? Was it because we had a problem? There was a concern that we weren't going to have kids at school on September 4?

Mr. John O'Toole: The by-election.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The by-election. My friend from Durham is tuned right in. He knows exactly what's coming next. What did Premier McGuinty base his call on, the recall of the Legislature? The fact that he had these two by-elections. Conveniently, his good friend Greg Sorbara stepped down in Vaughan just to assist with having two by-elections on the same day. Now he's running the Liberal campaign full-time, which he was only doing part-time before, I guess. Those are the things that people are going to remember. They're going to ask themselves this question.

Dalton McGuinty travelled around Ontario in the last half of the summer having photo ops in empty schools. Every second day he'd have a press release going out: "Dalton McGuinty will tour school A and school B." He got to Z, and then he got to AA. He just wanted to be seen around schools, because the education Premier was going to make sure that everyone knew that he was touring the schools. Who was he talking to? The janitor getting the place ready? All summer long he was visiting schools. I wonder what was going on there. All he was doing was setting the table to go out talking about this by-election now.

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Now he's portraying himself as the tough guy. The gunslinger is back in town. There's a new sheriff in town, and his name is Dalton McGuinty, "And you folks over there, you're gonna to take what I give ya, or I'm gonna make you take it. If you don't take it, we're gonna force it on you. We'll pass the bills."

This week he's talking, "I want the rest of the public sector to know that I'm coming after them." That's Dalton's tough talk because, you see, he hasn't got the message out quite the way he wants it in KW yet. He wants everybody to think that now he's going to be the deficit slayer. Well, I'll tell you what: He is certainly the deficit creator because he has taken this province into record levels of deficit. He has taken this province into record levels of debt, and as Don Drummond, his handpicked economic advisor says, if something isn't done to turn this big ship around, by 2018 we're going to be looking at a deficit of \$30 billion and we will be looking at a debt of \$411 billion, I believe it is—\$411 billion.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's 4-1-1. I'll tell you, somebody better call 911 because this government has put an emergency on this province, and nobody's paying attention. There's no accountability—no accountability whatsoever. I just hear today that—and nobody talks about it—they used to have a dedicated arm of the OPP to follow the health sector, to watch out to ensure that accountability was being followed.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And McGuinty got rid of them—got rid of them.

Interjection: Shame.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And what did we get after that? We got eHealth. We got Ornge. What's next?

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Unbelievable. George Smitherman and Dalton McGuinty said, "We don't need them. We can look after our own accountability." Unbelievable.

Folks, I'm going to tell you that we're going to do what we have to do. We're going to do the right thing. We've said from the start. Our leader, Tim Hudak, when this bill was tabled, said we're going to support it. We're going to support it because we need to recognize that, for the first time, Dalton McGuinty is getting the message just a little wee bit. He's talking tough now. Well, I can

tell you, since last November our leader, Tim Hudak, has been telling him that if you want to get Ontario's fiscal house in order, if you want to turn this mess around, you've got to start with a public sector wage freeze, an across-the-board public sector wage freeze, not collective agreement by collective agreement. There's 4,000 of them in existence in Ontario. You're dealing with a couple here with the education sector. How long will it be before you get it all done? You can't live in a dream world like that and think that you're going to go through every collective agreement and decide that now you're going to start to implement wage restraint.

You talk about fairness. You talk about equality. That is the right thing to do, so that everybody who is fortunate enough—and I'm proud of the public service we have in Ontario. But let's not kid ourselves, they also have a very good job, and those jobs are secure. Those jobs are well-paying, and they're secure. In times of restraint, and in times when the province is facing a fiscal Armageddon, those people also have to share in the shouldering of that burden, and what's been happening here under Dalton McGuinty in the last nine years, it's just been, "Raid the fridge, folks. There's lots of it here. Take whatever you need because we've got more coming because we've got the taxpayers of Ontario behind us, and we're just going to get more."

Well, those days are gone. Those days are gone, and now we've got to actually start to exercise the kind of restraint that Tim Hudak has been talking about. If you go back to the Hansard in this House, from 2008, when the recessions hit, and then in the 2010 budget, when we looked at what you people were doing as part of your so-called austerity package, it was a bloody joke. Our leader was talking about it then, how you people had to face the reality of what's happening in Ontario. So now, finally, we've got them to the point where they're actually beginning to do something. That is why we're going to support Bill 115, which will implement a wage freeze on Ontario's teachers. I'll say it's a quasi-wage freeze, because they're still allowing people to move up the grid. So only about 60% of the teachers are going to have a wage freeze, and about 40% of the teachers are actually still going to have the ability to move up the grid.

The other thing I like about what we forced on them, kicking and screaming as usual, is that we're now going to make sure that the principals get to make the decision about who gets hired on as a supply teacher—not the unions, which are too powerful by half already, but the principals, who know best what the needs of their school are, the needs of those students and the quality of the people they are looking at as far as implementing the teaching decisions in that school.

We will support it. There's a lot more work to be done. But stop playing games just for the sake of by-elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say, I'm not happy participating in yet another time allocation debate. I

expected last fall, when the Legislature was recalled by way of the election—I shouldn't say "recalled"; as a result of the last election in October of last year—that while the minority Parliament lasted, it was highly unlikely, if not impossible, I thought, that we would actually see time allocation brought forward without the will of the three parties. We've agreed to move forward on legislation together by way of programming motions, and we did so under the bullying bill, but it was a question where the three parties agreed. It was a unanimous consent motion to allow certain business of the House to go forward, and I think that's fair. But I never thought—je n'ai jamais pensé pour deux secondes qu'il pourrait y avoir la possibilité de voir le bâillon amené à cette législature.

Interjection.

M. Gilles Bisson: Je parle français, puis tu peux écouter à travers les traducteurs. M^{me} Meilleur me comprend, je le sais bien. Elle est mon amie. Mais je n'ai jamais cru pour deux secondes qu'on se trouverait dans un gouvernement minoritaire avec un bâillon. C'est quelque chose qui était incroyable, parce que, d'habitude, l'opposition n'est jamais d'accord avec le bâillon. J'ai trouvé ça très difficile à accepter, que les conservateurs tout à coup ont décidé de revenir à leur ancienne pratique d'avoir un bâillon quand ça vient à tous les projets de loi.

We remember, those of us who served here in the time of the Harris-Eves regime, that there was not a piece of legislation that came through this House without time allocation. A bill was introduced, a time allocation motion—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And I hear my Conservative friends remind me just how well it worked. Maybe from the government perspective it did, but every bill that came before the House from the Conservatives was brought forward by way of time allocation, and I think that's rather sad.

Is there a want on the part of majority governments to use time allocation? Absolutely. I would suspect that governments that are in a majority in all three parties would at times use time allocation if they felt that the opposition was being extremely unhelpful in being able to get the government to pass its business. But there is a threshold. To find ourselves, in barely—we got through seven and a half hours of debate, roughly, maybe eight hours of debate. To force time allocation on this bill I think is rather unfortunate. I think a government in a majority should always be tempered when using time allocation, even in majority. It should allow the opposition to have some time to be able to debate and some time in committee to be able to have hearings on a bill and to do proper work when it comes to clause-by-clause.

Time allocation tends to rush a bill through, and doing so often makes for very bad legislation. I remember, for example, under Mr. Harris, the changes to the Planning Act. They did a change to the Planning Act. The opposition at the time, being myself and the Liberals,

said, "You've got flaws in this bill. If you're trying to do the following things with the Planning Act, the way that you've drafted it ain't gonna work." We brought five pieces of legislation to the House in order to fix that original bill. Why? Because it was time-allocated and there wasn't enough time given to the bill to have proper debate, proper hearings and proper clause-by-clause.

To find my Conservative friends in support of time allocation at this point, I just have a bit of a problem with it. I understand why they want to do it. They, like the Liberals, believe that you should have a wage freeze in Ontario. They, like the Liberals, believe that there shouldn't be free collective bargaining, that the only way to resolve these things is by coming down with the hammer. I understand the Liberals and Conservatives want to do that. But I think it's rather unfortunate that the opposition, in this case the Conservatives, has decided to support the government when it comes to time allocation.

God, we're only 17 members in the NDP. Even if we wanted to—and I'm not saying we were going to—we couldn't have held it up for very long. We were down to 10-minute speeches at second reading. So even if New Democrats en masse decided that we were going to marshal in all of our troops, we couldn't have held up the debate for another day. So what was the point of time allocation? Because the government says there's a crisis.

1700

Ah, now we're getting to the central part of the debate. The government said, "Ah, there's a crisis in education, and if we don't get this legislation passed by September 1 there's going to be disruption in the classroom. There are going to be strikes. The teachers are going to be walking the picket line." What's the date today? September 4. Oh, the legislation hasn't passed. Did the schools open this morning?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, they did.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, the schools opened this morning? Were the teachers there? Did the students all show up? Were they all happy? I know my grandson, Nathaniel—it was his first day of school today. Nathaniel—at Louis-Rhéaume—isn't excited about going to school today, but the best thing he'll ever do in all his life is go to school and get a good education in the public system.

There was no crisis. The teachers had said at the beginning of the process, "We're prepared to give you a two-year wage freeze." What part of English don't you understand? A two-year wage freeze offered by the unions—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Did they say that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, they did. They put that out right at the beginning. They said, "We are prepared to accept a two-year wage freeze," and the government went, "I didn't hear that. Oh, heck no. Because if I hear that, I can't create a crisis in education to allow me to have a ballot question in the by-elections."

So then the government said, "Oh, yeah? Well, maybe they're talking about a two-year wage freeze but they're all going to be on strike September 1." And OSSTF came

back and said, "Tell you what: We're not going to have any strike votes. We're calling them all back," because they wanted to do the tough work that has to be done, which is to sit down with their employers—being the school boards and the province—to come to some agreement that makes some sense to both parties.

We all understand that negotiation isn't easy, right? If I'm the employer and you're the workers, we have a different set of objectives at the table. I want to give less and you want to have more, and we understand that; that's fair. Employers are trying to save money, and workers and their representatives—the unions—are trying to get a better deal for their members. So, yes, it is hard; it is difficult. I've negotiated both sides of the table. I've been a union negotiator and I've been a management negotiator, and I can tell you, it's equally difficult on both sides of the table. It is not easy. But I'm telling you, the only way that you resolve these things is by being at the table.

Now, let's take a look at what's happening here. The government is saying, "Oh, we don't want to go through this pesky process of negotiation because we need to have a crisis to have a ballot question in the upcoming election." What private sector employer has this right to legislate a contract onto their employers? And God, I'm not suggesting for a second we should—maybe my Conservative friends do, maybe my Liberal friends do, but I would never argue that. There's a double standard here.

If I'm Xstrata or I'm Air Canada or whoever you might be, and you have to sit down as a private company and negotiate with your employees—well, I shouldn't say Air Canada because they're federally regulated, but for sure the mining sector, the forestry sector, the service centres and others have to sit down and go through the process. No employer has the right to say, "Well, you know what? I don't like this. I'm going to legislate an agreement, and it's going to be what you're going to have to accept." Nobody has that right. Why does the government take that right? And why would we, as legislators, take part in giving that right? It's kind of silly, in my mind. Why? Because it is not about negotiations; it is not about getting an agreement by September 1. This is all about by-elections.

The government decided, "You know what? If we go into the by-elections in Vaughan and in Waterloo, what are the people going to talk about when it comes to the campaign?" People are going to talk about Ornge, the scandal that cost Ontario millions and hundreds of millions of dollars of spent money that shouldn't have been spent because of the scandal at Ornge. They were going to talk about eHealth—again, millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars that were squandered—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Billions.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Billions of dollars—I stand corrected—that were squandered on eHealth. They were going to talk about the cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga, where one of those cancellations to date has cost us \$180 million because—

Mr. John Yakubuski: It's \$190 million.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's \$190 million—\$187 million, to be correct—in order to try to save a few seats in the Mississaugas, that was going to be the issue. And Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal strategists said, "Oh, my God, we've got to change the channel. How do we change the channel? We've got to find some way so they don't talk about these things." Because if they talk about Ornge and they talk about eHealth and they talk about Oakville and they talk about 13,000 horses being killed because of what's going on in the horse racing industry, or any other issue, they're not going to have a very good chance in those by-elections.

So they said, "Let's change the subject. Let's create a crisis in education." So what they did, they went out and decided to game the system in such a way—and this is what Liberals are so good at: self-interest. What's good for the Liberal Party is good for everybody. They talk about Liberal values. Thank God we rejected those values federally. The Liberals are down to 21% in the polls and are probably not going to do too well in the next federal election because of some of the Liberal values that got them into Gomery and a whole bunch of other issues.

The truth is that the government has decided to game the system. Why? Because they couldn't afford to have an election on the issues that are actually the issues of the day. So they said, "Let's have an education crisis. That way, when we have an education crisis, we can say to people, 'Your kids aren't going to be going to school come September 1. There's going to be disruption in the classroom, and the teachers are going to be on strike.' We can stand up as Liberals and say, 'We're with you, the parents and the kids. We want to maintain the classroom, and we're going to bring a solution to this problem that shows how tough we can be with teachers.'"

Madam Speaker, what happened on the road to Damascus? The Liberals, I thought, were the friends of the teachers. My God. Do you remember two elections ago? People were so mad at Mike Harris and Ernie Eves at the time because of the things that happened in education. They went out and formed these coalitions with the teachers. They were going to be the friends of the teachers and together they worked hand in hand to defeat the Mike Harris government. On becoming Premier of Ontario, Mr. McGuinty was the education Premier, and he walked hand in hand, in solidarity, with the big union bosses. He was with the big unions back then. Well, jeez, what happened, Madam Speaker?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, they still are. You have a funny way of showing it, let me tell you. That was funny.

The point I make is, when it was to their advantage politically to be able to woo teachers to win an election, the Liberals did what was good for the Liberals. They didn't necessarily do what was good for the teachers, the kids, the ratepayers or the school board trustees. They did what was good for the Liberals. They went out there and they chastised the Conservatives.

I agree with some of the stuff they said about the Tories.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Hey, listen, your education record wasn't exactly stellar, my friend. I was here. I remember. But I want to keep my attack over there. So don't get me going, or else I'm going to move it over here again.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So I just say, the government—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Now I've got the Liberals wanting me to go after the Tories again. But you know what? There's very little difference. Tweedledee, Tweedledumber. You're all the same on this one.

I would just say that it was clear that the government really had a strategy by which it tried to deal with the by-elections. They decided that, all of a sudden, they no longer were friends of teachers, they were no longer friends of the big union bosses, as they had been going out and talking against big union—can you imagine Liberals running around the province and speaking in language against—and they used the words “big union bosses.”

They're stealing the Conservative language. What is this world coming to? I would be worried if I were Conservative. Could it be they're trying to get some right-wing votes?

Then they're whacking teachers. I've listened to the Minister of Education, I've listened to the Minister of Finance, I've listened to the government House leader, I've listened to the Premier attack teachers at every opportunity early on in this debate and even to now, because it was politically expedient for Liberals to do so. Why? Because there are by-elections. It's all about, “How can I game the system for the benefit of the Liberal Party?” With Liberals, it's never about doing what's right.

I want to be quite honest, Madam Speaker. Every political party wants to get to government, and once you're in government, you want to stay there. So, of course, New Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives will say things—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's where I'm going—say things in order to advance their chances to get to government or to stay there. But you've got to have some basic principles.

I understand the Conservatives. I don't agree with them, but I respect them. They say they believe in a wage freeze, period. They believe that workers shouldn't get a raise for the next couple of years. The way to balance the budget, say the Conservatives, is austerity and a wage freeze. I don't agree with them, but, God bless, at least they're being true to their principles.

The Liberals, at one point, used to talk like New Democrats, and now they sound like Conservatives in a hurry. They're out there trying to out-right-wing the Conservative Party that is the right-wing party of Ontario. They're now using language that you would never have

thought a year ago. Imagine a year ago, before the last election, if somebody were to propose that the Liberals were going to come out and attack the the teachers sometime in the future, within 12 months—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Or big union bosses.

1710

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Or big union bosses. You would have never thought that was possible, because didn't they have—what was it called? The family coalition?

Interjection: Working Families Coalition.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Working Families Coalition, and they got together with everybody in order to be able to do what was right for the Liberal Party—not about their principles about supporting working people, not about making sure that we have a sustainable system of education that provides the best education for our kids in a way that makes some sense to the taxpayer. It was all about Liberals gaming the system for themselves, because Liberals are self-serving. We've seen it in Ottawa: Gomery and everything else. We've seen it in Ontario: eHealth, Ornge, Oakville, Mississauga. We've seen them all. But that's what the Liberals love to do.

Now they're in a by-election and people will say, “Oh, no, no.” I heard some members on the government side say, “Listen, we had nothing to do with the creation of the by-election in Waterloo.” I heard that last Thursday.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And he's actually admitting he didn't.

They offered the Tory member of the riding, Liz Witmer, a job at the Workers' Compensation Board in exchange for resigning her seat so they could have a by-election.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Did we force that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And the government is still at this day saying, “Did we force that?” My God, if you didn't want her to resign, you wouldn't have made the offer. It's pretty simple to me.

My point is that the government, again, does things for their own reasons. They offered Elizabeth Witmer, a person whom I have great respect for, who was elected in 1990 along with myself, the same year—and I dealt with her as an opposition member and as a minister of the crown. I had great, great respect for her. I don't agree with her politics—her politics, I'll leave that aside—but she was essentially a person who tried to do her job. What the Liberals did is that they gamed it and made her an offer that she couldn't refuse, and she decided to leave at the offer of the Liberals. Again, what was that all about? It was about Liberals doing what's right for Liberals.

Was it because they wanted to have a stellar chair at the Workers' Compensation Board? Hey, there are all kinds of people who could have filled that job. I know for a fact that there are members and former members of the assembly who would have loved to have that job, former members who had not run in the last election. And I won't use names, but I know a number of Liberals who did, and there were other people who could have done the

job. No, they gave it to her because they wanted to create a by-election in order to be able to get a majority in this House, and then they said, "Okay. Now that we've got her out, the next part of the strategy is, we need to create a crisis," and they decided to create the crisis around education.

So they're in an election now. I can't show you this, Mrs. Speaker, because it would be a prop if I held it up like that or I held it up like that, so I'll leave it down. I can't hold it up, because if I did that, it would be a prop. So I'll put it back down again, and I will just say—this is interesting—the Liberals who say they're not gaming this for the by-election, read the headline on the latest flyer to go out by the Liberal Party in Kitchener–Waterloo: "Teacher Unions are Preparing to Strike." Holy jeez, what happened this morning? The schools opened. The teachers said, "We're not going on strike." The teachers said, "We're prepared to give you a two-year wage freeze."

The Liberals are now bashing the teachers and bashing their union friends—because why? There's maybe a chance of winning a by-election. I will predict they will not win Kitchener–Waterloo. I ultimately always believe in the public. The public, at the end of the day, sees through these kinds of things. I just think it's a pretty cynical move on the part of the government to try to make it an election issue strictly for their own political gain. So I say it's rather, rather sad.

The other thing I want to speak to very quickly—and I've only got about 10 minutes left, but I need to make this point. Mr. Hudak, about last spring sometime, suggested—as he is today; he's been true to his word all the way through, so I understand this is the Conservative position, and I don't mean this to attack Tories. He believes the way you balance a budget is to force a wage freeze on all public sector employees, broader public and direct to the OPS; all right? That's the position that the Conservatives—well, the Liberals now took, but that was the position that the Conservatives took. Now, I disagree. I think we need to moderate our wage demands. I think we need to negotiate frugal collective agreements with our employees—I don't disagree—but I believe there are other things like revenue generation from creating a stronger economy that would allow you to build an economy with the revenue. But that's another story.

The point is, the Conservatives and the leader of the Conservative Party raised this issue back last spring. And when he raised the issue with the Premier of the day, he said, "Mr. Premier, you must do a wage freeze. You must do a wage freeze for two years." And what did the Premier say?

Mr. John Yakubuski: "Can't do it."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: "Can't do it. It's against the law. It'll be challenged in the courts. Didn't you see British Columbia?" And then he cited the British Columbia court challenges that came out of the Liberal government in British Columbia who froze public sector wages and chose not to negotiate. It went to the Supreme Court of Canada and it was overturned.

The Liberal Premier, the Liberal Minister of Education and the Liberal finance minister and others for months were saying it was unconstitutional to do this, and they actually laughed at the Conservatives. They were laughing at them. They were saying, "Oh, there they go with dumb ideas. There go the Conservatives: same old same old. This is not the way to do it. There are better ways of being able to do it."

All of a sudden, Tim Hudak came in and woke up, I guess, Mr. McGuinty, or maybe Mr. McGuinty was already there all along, I would argue, probably. And all of a sudden the Liberals have flipped their position and they're now saying wage freezes are the only way to go, and legislated wage freezes.

Interjection: Wow.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Wow. I have to say, man, that road to Damascus is a really short one, because it wasn't all that long ago that my good friend the Premier of Ontario was actually opposed to the idea because he thought it was unconstitutional. Now he says it's his idea.

Mr. John Yakubuski: So he fell off his horse on the road to Damascus and now he wants to kill the horse.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He fell off his horse on the way to Woodbine. That's a whole other story.

That was funny. That was a good heckle. I enjoyed that.

But anyway, I just say the Premier changed his mind and all of a sudden said, "Oh, no. Now it's our idea." So now you've got this kind of squabble going on between the Tories and the Conservatives where they're out in the middle sword-fighting, saying, "My idea." "No, my idea." "My idea." "No, my idea." "No, no, my idea." Andrea Horwath is looking at both of them, going, "Boy, you guys look silly."

I've got to say, what happened? All of a sudden you guys are fighting to see whose idea it was. Well, I'm going to score it. It was a Conservative idea. All right? It was clear. The Conservatives last spring put the idea forward, and the Conservatives were true to their word. The Liberals stole the Tory idea because it was, in their mind, expedient for the by-elections to be able to do it.

I've got to say to my Conservative friends, I don't know if I'd be happy or sad that Mr. McGuinty agrees with you, and I have some experience. All right? I'm not too sure, because they're not very popular on the other side there. You probably know and see the polls. They're running third.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I know they're not popular in my riding.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're not popular in my riding either—not popular in a whole bunch of ridings.

I would say, I feel for my Conservative friends, because when Liberals start to steal Conservative ideas—I won't say the next line. I'll try to be nice and not be too mean to my Conservative friends.

I just say, it's pretty clear they did this for a political reason. What's worse is that the civil liberties association and others have come before the cameras across Ontario and have said they are going to take this up in a court

challenge. I think we have to take that rather seriously, and I'm hoping that in the very limited amount of time that we have for committee hearings, we're going to hear from some of those lawyers and have them properly explain their arguments as to why they find this to be unconstitutional and why the courts will strike down this legislation. I think it will be very helpful to hear that.

But what they're saying is, like the British Columbia case, the Liberal government can't say, "Oh, we met the threshold to try to get an agreement." Just because you tried to get an agreement doesn't mean to say you can trump somebody's rights under the Constitution. You know, "I tried not to do something that was against the law," is not an acceptable argument in the courts when trying to defend yourself for having broken the law. The government is trying to make the argument that they somehow have reached a threshold that allows them to break the law. That's unconstitutional. You just can't do that. There's a process established under the law that says, "This is what people can do when it comes to negotiating wages," and it isn't easy. It's a lot of hard work. We all understand that. But that's what you've got to go through.

And the sad part is, this is going to cost taxpayers in the hundreds of millions of dollars. What's really cynical about this is that by the time this goes to court and we get a decision, and let's say the decision overturns—which I think it will, but I'm not the one who can decide that; the courts will have to decide. But if they overturn this decision, they overturn the law, it probably won't even be Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals who will be in government. It will be an NDP government or it will be a Conservative government that will be there to deal with the fallout of this legislation.

1720

I just want to put on the record now—because I believe there's a good chance that Andrea Horwath will be the next Premier of Ontario—that this is one heck of a legacy to leave a future government. This points back to my original point. This is all about the cynicism of Liberals. It's about the Liberals gaming the system for them. I'm sure they got the briefings from the staff at the ministry and the lawyers at legislative counsel who said, "This may not stand up in the courts," and somebody at the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Finance had to tell cabinet—unfortunately, we can't ask for these documents because they're private, but I bet you they exist. They had a conversation at cabinet and said, "Listen, there's a chance that this will be struck down in the courts, and if it is struck down, it's going to cost you X amount of hundreds of millions of dollars." The government decided it was better to make a decision over the short term for their own Liberal fortunes than it was to make a decision for the people of Ontario, and if there's one reason why people should be voting NDP in the next by-elections in Vaughan and Waterloo, it is exactly that.

Do not give the Liberals an opportunity to get a majority in this House. We have seen two majority governments through this government. We have seen two—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: A little panic here.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, we'll see who's panicking on Thursday, my friend.

The point I would make is, this government doesn't need a majority, doesn't deserve a majority and should never be given a majority because, in the end, the Liberal Party is not about making sure things are done properly and correctly for the public; it's all about the Liberals' self-interest, and I think that is really, really sad.

I just want to end on this particular point. The government is—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's such a silly thing. You know exactly—anyway, I won't even debate that one.

The other point I want to make, the unfortunate part is—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Look at that. Liberals are protesting all of a sudden because they know that, in fact, in their heart of hearts they are self-interested when it comes to power. They will do whatever they can in order to game the system to benefit Liberals and not necessarily the public. So I understand why they're professing.

The last point I want to make is this: The sad part is, we're going to get, essentially, tomorrow morning or—what is it we're getting? We're getting tomorrow afternoon and a little bit of tomorrow evening for public hearings. We're going to get a little bit of time on Thursday morning for public hearings on a bill that is pretty controversial, we can all agree, and has got questions of constitutionality. I think that's rather sad.

Again, I want to end where I started. When you rush legislation through this House and through the committee process, it makes for very bad legislation. The government had already admitted at the government House leaders' meetings that they weren't in a rush to get this legislation, that it wasn't retroactive, that if they got the bill sometime in early September or mid-September, that would be fine. But instead, because of the by-elections, they had to do what they're doing now to game it for the Liberal fortunes, because it's all about Liberals; right? It's not about the people. It's always about the Liberals.

The point is, we are now going to short-shrift the process of committee and we're going to end up with a bill, quite frankly, that is pretty flawed, and I think that's sad. If we've learned anything in this House—and I think the Conservatives and Liberals will agree with me, because we've all seen this from both the government side and the opposition side of the House, at least some of us, that short-shrifting legislative debate, short-shrifting time for public hearings and clause-by-clause makes for very bad legislation. The government could have gotten its way at the end. We could have only held up the debate if we so chose, and we didn't want to do that. But the government, essentially, a day they would have had second reading—and what would it have been for the government to say, "We're going to allow a couple of weeks of hearings, two days one week, two days the next week"? They still would have got their bill.

There are only 17 New Democrats in the House. We can't hold it—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're not going to go on strike. I'm going to make you a \$100 bet now, publicly, that they're not going to be on strike this month. I can guarantee you that, at the very least, which means you have time. If you allowed them to negotiate at the bargaining table, I very much doubt there would be strikes either, because most people out there—I don't care if you're a teacher, you're a cab driver, you're a miner, you're a legislator; we all understand times are tough. Government doesn't have a lot of money. You can't keep on spending money you don't have. At one point, you've got to balance the budget, which means to say you've got to temper your demands, and there's hardly anybody out there who doesn't understand that. It would seem that the government doesn't understand that, or at the very least they're trying to make it look as if they don't understand that so that they can game the system for themselves when it comes to by-elections. And I'd be very surprised if they win that by-election.

Speaker, I want to inform you that we will be voting no on the time allocation—I don't want you to be surprised—and we will be voting no to this legislation because we think this is the wrong way to go. Discussion is always the best way to get the resolution, and you do that by sitting down and doing the hard work that has to be done across the table from each other to get the agreement that's needed to move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to add to the debate on the motion that is in front of us. Let me say that I have been in this House long enough to remember when, on both sides—and I happened to be on the other side once as well—we would be shouting at each other when a motion to cut the debate would be introduced. I think we are at a particular time now where both sides agree that it's time to move on. I think the people out there are telling us it's time to move on.

In the last three or four days, I think I have met people at church, at the coffee shop and in the malls saying, "What's all the big debate going on if you folks have already decided?" Well, we have decided; the bill has been introduced, but it requires a certain process that we have to go through in the House before something is finally approved and it becomes law. They say, "But it doesn't make sense because you have it already and the opposition agrees to go ahead and do it, so why don't you get on with it?"

Saturday I met with some teachers, and they said, "We are professionals"—and we agree with them; our teachers are professional people—"and we understand that we are going through a particular economic time. So if you've got to do it, go ahead and do it."

Now we have the motion in front of us to cut the debate or bring it to a close, if you will, and we are moving that way.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It will still go to committee.

Mr. Mario Sergio: It will still be going to committee, we still have some further public hearings, but it's time to move on.

It was interesting the other day. Coming down, I was listening to one of the talk shows, and our friend Buzz Hargrove was saying in answer to a question, "We have the best education system in the world." I think the opposition knows that; I think the people out there know that. But it's important to recognize how we got to be the best education system in the English-speaking world. I have to take that from the good comments from my good friend from Trinity-Spadina the other day when he said, "You have gained the respect and the love of the teachers and the union over the last eight or nine years. Why would you go and do something now when you did so much for the education system in the past eight or nine years?" That's a good point. How did we get to this particular stage?

We got to this particular stage because, when we won the election in 2003, our Premier, Mr. McGuinty, said, "We have to put enough money in the education system to make this the best education system in the world. We want to have the best-educated workforce," and so we did.

We've come up with a number of improvements to the education system, and that is why we have today the best education system in the world. We still enjoy the smallest class sizes. Our dropout rate is the lowest in history. We have hired 20,000 teachers, and they are still there. We have hired the 10,000 support staff, and they are still there. We have built over 155 new schools, and we are still building.

We have kept our core value to our people of Ontario when it came to education and other programs. I think we are at the stage today where we can say, "Either we maintain those programs or we trash those programs."

What I have seen in the House in the last few days is good. I think it's important. I think we can come together and work and decide and deliver on some important things for the people of Ontario. It is much better when we can do that than tearing people apart. I think it's much better, Speaker.

1730

This is one of those issues where we can go to our professional people, the teachers—and they have all our respect. They are professional because they understand that the economic times demand some action. As of July, some of the boards have said, "Yes, we will accept the demands of the government." We have been at the table since February, I believe, so we had ample time to really, really negotiate. School started today, Speaker. It would have been a wonderful thing if we had all the boards saying, "Okay. Well, it is not what we really wanted, but we're going to go ahead with it." We still have groups that have not said yes. We have given them until the end of the year to come on board. It is not something that we are really shoving down their throat and saying "absolutely." This is the situation.

Interjection: It's time.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Absolutely.

I only want to mention a couple of points from the bill, Madam Speaker, because I haven't got time to go through the entire bill.

If there is one consistent request that comes to my office—and they come even with their parents. They feel maybe they can press the issue more heavily, if you will, on us, on the local members, saying, “Look, it's four years. My daughter cannot get a job.”

I think it's important, Speaker, that we take that into consideration. There is good reason that if we have the retired teachers, instead of giving them carte blanche to work as long as they want, 90 days, 150 days a year, we cut them down so we make some room for our young teachers.

Interjection: That's only fair.

Mr. Mario Sergio: If they are professional today, our teachers, Speaker, it is because of what we have given them in the last eight, nine years. We have sunk billions of dollars into the education system to have the best education system. We have so much pressure coming from our neighbours—Asia, European countries—and I think it's important that we provide our young people with the best education system.

When we came to power, we started with early childhood education. We started at that particular time. We have introduced, Speaker—and I think there are more schools now adopting full-day kindergarten. Why is that, Speaker? Because we want to provide them, at an early age, with the best education possible. I think it's important. It's good for the students, it's good for the people, it's working for our labour force and it's good for the economy.

I think we are at a stage where we can say as a House, “Okay. We're at this stage. It's been introduced. We've got to do it. The debate has got to come to an end, but we

still have a couple of days of hearings.” People are welcome, teachers are welcome, unions are welcome to come by and say their piece.

The fact is that we are in a particular economic situation, but I think they do understand that something has to be done. Our Conservative friends understand that something has to be done. Deep down, I believe that even our NDP friends believe that.

I would like to say: Let's not all be one-sided and speak for the teachers' unions. Let's speak for the teachers as well, and let's move with this particular bill that is in front of us. Speaker, I want to thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Milloy has moved government motion number 48. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

I have two deferral slips. They request that this will be done tomorrow; that it be deferred until Wednesday, September 5.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Madam Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? In my opinion, the ayes have it.

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until Wednesday at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1736.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**



Wednesday 5 September 2012

Mercredi 5 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 5 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 5 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 4, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / *Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member for Ottawa—Orléans.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Nepean—Carleton, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's okay. You know what? They've been saying for years over in Ottawa—Orléans that they need a good MPP. Guess what happened in Orléans yesterday? After nine years of Dalton McGuinty's Liberals promising to fix the 174/417 split, a sinkhole swallowed a car whole last night on the drive home in Ottawa—Orléans. I think it's time for a change in government, and they need a new MPP in Ottawa—Orléans. So thank you very much, Speaker, for drawing attention to that issue that occurred yesterday.

But it is, of course, a pleasure to be here this morning to speak on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus and our finance critic, Peter Shurman, from Thornhill, regarding the healthy home tax credit for seniors.

The question we have, given the sense of urgency on issues like the province-wide need for a legislated wage freeze across the entire broader public sector as well as the scandal at Ornge and the need for the Liberals to bring Bill 50 forward, is, why are they place-holding and filibustering their own legislation? We are concerned on this side of the House that that is what the Liberals are doing. They're not serious about passing legislation. If they were, Speaker, this bill would have passed before the summer session—the intersession that occurred last

June, but here we are. We're here debating a piece of legislation that was effectively window dressing after the fall election last October. Here we are a year later.

In many instances, this government will ram legislation through this House, but on this issue, they haven't done that. Why, I suspect, they chose to delay and dither is because only a tiny segment of the population will actually benefit from this tax credit. We all know, Speaker, that those who have a little bit more money can do a little bit more in terms of renovations. This actually does benefit those who are, I would suggest, the haves of the senior population, not the have-nots. We all understand in this assembly that those of less affluence are likely less able to do renovations in their own communities or on their own home, and that presents a particular problem, especially when this government is suggesting that they are going to help people get by, particularly seniors.

We understand that those less affluent seniors will no more readily be able to pay the \$8,500 portion of the \$10,000 under this bill. They won't be able to do it today because they weren't able to do it yesterday. We felt at the time that it would have been far more equitable to bring in an HST cut-off on home heating. We felt that that would have helped all Ontario seniors, but also all families across this province who are suffering as a result of the 300,000 jobs that were lost in the last three elections under this government's watch.

The government really hasn't provided, as well, any details to us in this assembly on how this would be done. They only suggest that there is an estimated cost, but at that point in time they're really not talking in detail about those costs.

The problem with this bill, of course, is that it segments further inside that group to address accessibility or functionality concerns. One of the concerns many of my colleagues have had in this assembly—I know, for example, that my colleague from the NDP will be bringing forward a piece of legislation on sprinklers for retirement homes. That helps seniors, because that's a necessity in our long-term-care homes. I told him I would speak positively toward his bill, because I think the safety of our seniors and of our population is incredibly important.

But this, of course, is a government that only likes to have some trinkets and baubles out at election time and immediately post-election to make it appear as if they're doing something. As I've just said, this piece of legislation won't really do much for many. The reality is that an entire segment of the population is cut out, and those who are less affluent are less likely to use it, even though they may require the services more.

We still believe that the best way to address some of the concerns we have in Ontario is to help all families and all seniors stimulate the economy by providing a pan-Ontario benefit such as the removal of the HST off electricity and/or home heating fuel. We know, for example—and I'll go back to what happened after we resumed sitting after the election almost a year ago this week—that a majority of people on this side of the House supported removing the HST from home heating.

We know that a majority of Ontarians supported political parties that wanted to remove the HST off home heating. We know that a vote took place in this assembly, put forward by the Ontario New Democrats and supported by the Ontario PCs, that would have removed the HST off home heating. We felt that would have been more fair, more equitable, more comprehensive. It would have assisted everyone, not just the few.

The government, as I said, has not really provided much detail on how this piece of legislation and this program would be funded, and that is a problem. We are facing a \$30-billion deficit. Don't take my word for it; take Don Drummond's, the chief economic adviser hand-picked by the Premier himself, who told us that if we don't get our spending under control in Ontario, we're going to put those core public services that we cherish and that we value at risk. He said that we needed to make a series of important decisions, tough decisions that would get us out of that hole.

This is another program that is undefined, with very few details. We don't know if the money that will be allocated to it is going to be spent wisely or appropriately, or on the people who will need it most. If the government really wanted to help Ontario's seniors and has a \$60-million short-term money allocation available, there are other ways to assist. I'm thinking specifically of investments in more long-term-care beds in our province. I suggested moments ago that there is an ability for us to remove the HST off home heating and hydro.

I've also suggested that the government could support my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek with his private member's motion to ensure sprinklers are in long-term-care homes and retirement homes, because that will save seniors. That speaks to their safety. That speaks to what a value is here in this assembly by a shared number of members of provincial Parliament.

0910

Now, when we came back, there was a sense of urgency in passing this particular piece of legislation, but as I have mentioned, it is almost 11 months that this bill has been left to languish on the order paper. It has been left to languish on the order paper because the government does not see it as a priority. But \$60 million—if that is indeed how much they intend to spend—is an awful lot of money when you're facing a \$30-billion deficit. It is not clear to us, as I have said repeatedly during my 10 minutes of debate so far, that this money will be spent for those who need it the most.

Speaker, we have been recalled back to this assembly early. Last week we were told that the government need-

ed to pass immediate legislation legislating teachers back to work, for a mandatory wage freeze for teachers so they wouldn't get their 5.5% increase on September 1. Now here we are, Speaker, at September 5; that legislation hasn't passed yet. In fact, as Christina Blizzard said the other day, this government appears to be filibustering its own legislation, because as we saw last week, instead of wanting to debate their own motion, they chose instead to put sort of a frivolous, non-binding, polarizing, wedge-driven debate on full-day kindergarten. If they truly wanted this assembly to work, they would get back to work. They would be focused on things that were more substantive, not the smallities. They wouldn't be dragging their feet on legislation like Bill 2, the second bill that was tabled.

Speaker, we all know in this assembly that Bill 1 is always put forward by the Premier. It's about an ancient act of the parliamentary workings in this assembly. It's a bill that never gets debated but never dies on the order paper. It is that symbolic; it is that important to our democracy. You would think a bill, Bill 2, would have been equally as important to this government, because it was their opportunity, after having been re-elected, to put forward something which they believed in fervently, something that they thought they could pass—a bill that would have been intended to help people. Instead, they chose to allow this to languish, as I have said repeatedly in this assembly, on the order paper.

We are now debating it today because we are at work an extra week early, and the government really doesn't have much on its legislative agenda with the exception of Bill 115, which I had mentioned previously: the teachers' legislation, the so-called Putting Students First Act—which brings me to my concern. My concern is that the government, today, is allowing legislation to remain on the order paper without any action whatsoever. They may use it as a political ploy.

I'll use another example, although it did pass last week: Bill 11. It was one which they allowed to languish in order for them to stoke up fears and angst among municipal leaders in Ontario; it was designed with misinformation, but the reality is it took forever to get that bill to a vote. That wasn't the opposition's fault; the government has the orders of the day. I also want to refer to Bill 50. Bill 50 could have been debated today. The government stands up—in fact, the Premier stands up almost daily to say that he expects the opposition to pass Bill 50. Speaker, we can't pass Bill 50 unless the government puts that on the order paper and we debate that bill and the government calls it to a vote.

So here we are now, a year later, finally getting around to third reading of Bill 2, the second piece of legislation—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I just want to refer to standing order 23(b), in terms of the debate dealing with the question under discussion, which is Bill 2 and not Bill 115 or Bill 50. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you for your point of order. It's duly noted, and if I feel that the member is drifting too far, I'll certainly stand up and remind her.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the intervention of the member from Peterborough. It can't be very comfortable to have to sit here and not debate legislation that your party says it supports. I must say I certainly did appreciate the support of his party last week when we did put something forward in this assembly in terms of calling the Auditor General in to review OLG's recent gaming plans.

But, Speaker, we're going to talk about this bill, as it is so-called important to this government. We know, for example, that if you're going to let something languish on the order paper for 11 months, it can't be that much of a priority. Yet at the same time—and I say this to my good colleagues here in the third party and in our own party, the official opposition—you would think, after raising Bill 50 each and every single day in this assembly since we returned, that Dalton McGuinty would want to put that on the order paper for debate. He would want to put his money where his mouth is.

But I think the question is, is he prepared to talk about Ornge and that scandal in this assembly? I don't think so, and I don't think he wants to give us a platform. He just wants to use that bill as cover when he's in question period to say he's doing something. It's almost like this bill, Bill 2, which should have been a priority because it was the second bill they put forward—you would think there would be a sense of urgency to pass this. Instead, it was on the order paper for 11 months, and you have to question whether or not this government really does care about this legislation, or if it's just a time-filler to say they're doing something.

It's almost like justice, Speaker. It must not only be done; it must also be seen to be done. This government appears to think that it's all a public relations exercise. Who cares if you get it done; let's just pretend. Let's make everyone think we're getting it done. The question is, do they really, really want to pass this legislation?

I would argue that it was on the order paper for 11 months. They're only hitting third reading now. We've passed legislation in this House quicker than a week has gone by. In fact, we'll pass a piece of legislation today with respect to the Board of Internal Economy lickety-split. It was done yesterday. That speaks to how quickly we can move and act in this assembly if there is a desire to get it done. This government here has made a calculated decision to drag this debate on when they could have put this forward much earlier. But they chose not to, because that is part of their political games.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I talked about this last week, Speaker. It's smallitics. It's when they like to dig into the weeds to play silly political games instead of actually getting something done for the people we've been sent here to represent. That's why I say that while some sen-

iors will appreciate this option, it will not be readily accessible and available to all Ontario seniors. We felt, and we still feel, that the best way to kick-start our economy and protect Ontario's seniors is to give them more money in their pockets so they can make the choices they want to make, not a government choice, not a government option that is not available and accessible to everyone. In fact, some might argue—and they probably have throughout this debate—that this option is actually skewed to more affluent seniors who can afford \$8,500 out of their pockets.

Now, I'm not sure. My mother is a widow, and I know my mother doesn't make a whole lot of money. She was a homemaker her whole life, and I can tell you that if she were asked to shell out \$8,500 to take part in a government program, it's highly unlikely that she would be able to do it without assistance from my sister, myself and other family members. So I then ask the government this question: Why are they making this program so inaccessible for widowed women? Why are they making it so inaccessible for those who have less affluence?

They may not be the people who support the Ontario Liberal Party, but they are all people who send MPPs to Queen's Park and who rely on us to pass good bills in a timely fashion. That hasn't occurred here. And that is why I question the timing of them bringing this back to the House. Is it just simply a time-filler or a filibuster to get through the next week and a half to prove they are still busy? Will this be sloughed off until the government decides later on, at another time, that they need a filler to pretend or, as I like to say, seem to be doing something?

0920

As we know, this government—and I've become acquainted with it over the past three terms—is really geared more toward public relations than sound public policy—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Self-interest.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and, as my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke says, self-interest.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: As I say to my colleague from St. Catharines, for whom I have enormous respect, the voice of reason often in this House is the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. I'm very fortunate that, in our seating plan, I have the opportunity to sit with him and seek his good counsel and guidance on a daily basis. I know, for example, he has spoken about this in the past. He has the same concerns I do, and, as a leader in our community, particularly in eastern Ontario, he and I bring a very important perspective to this assembly on Bill 2.

Speaker, if the government wants to pass this—I'm not saying we're going to support them, but if they want to pass this, I would urge them to bring it to a vote today. It would be important enough for us to have that conversation. But as I've said, I think they're going to allow this to languish, this debate to go on. Maybe we'll be here this time next year still debating Bill 2. Although it was deemed the second most important piece of legislation to

put forward after the election, we know by far it is not at all important to them, given they have waited this long to actually call it again for third reading.

Speaker, in my final seconds, I would like to thank you for your indulgence during this debate. I'm looking forward to hearing ideas from all corners of the assembly on this important issue in helping our seniors. I would like the government to acknowledge that this is by far a bill that has waited too long and will help too few.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to comment on the comments of the member from Nepean–Carleton. We are here discussing Bill 2. As someone new to this House, I also assumed that Bill 2, the first thing introduced by the government, would also be a high-priority item, which it may or may not be, since we are discussing it 11 months later.

I'd like to point out that one thing I've learned in my time here is that the party across, the governing party, is really good at the titles: the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act.

Hon. James J. Bradley: We learned that from the Conservatives.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm glad to hear that both parties are really good at the titles, but they're really, really good at the titles.

We will vote in favour of this when the government brings it forward, and when people come to my office I will try to explain to them how it works. A lot of them are going to be disappointed, very disappointed, because this bill is more about the press release than it is about helping seniors. It will help some; it will help the privileged few. The argument is that if somebody wants a grab bar for 50 bucks, they can apply and get \$1.50 or \$2.50. But it doesn't work that way; you're not going to do it for little stuff. If you really want to help seniors, you should broaden it out, as we said in committee.

What the government is doing here is doing as much as it can to promote itself with as little action as possible. That seems to be the modus operandi of this government. That's why we're sitting here two weeks or a week early discussing things that could have been discussed much earlier, or later, because as we all know, the teachers are still in school.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from York West.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair.

I was paying very close attention to the remarks by the member from Nepean–Carleton. I have to say that my seniors are no different than the seniors in any other part of our province, and their family members are no different either. I travel to two or three nursing homes almost every week, because I have family members in nursing homes, retirement homes, and there is a constant cry that I hear from those people and their family members: "We wish we could be in our home." Even though they receive good care, good attention, the family members and

the patients say, "I wish I could have stayed in my home longer."

We should be grateful as legislators that we are doing something and not being simply legislators. I believe that if any law that we approve in this chamber here were to improve the life of one senior, we should do it. We should not be so petty-political. Even if one senior were to benefit from this particular law, it's worthwhile doing it. As we all know as legislators, not every law that we approve in this building is aimed at or is going to help everybody. It doesn't work that way, Speaker. There are certain laws that apply and help certain members in our society and other laws that apply to others. This one here goes a long way in making sure that our seniors can live more comfortably and longer in their own homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened attentively to my colleague from Nepean–Carleton because I sit beside her. I do want to comment on the comments from my colleague from York West. We'd better help more than one senior at \$60 million, or it's money badly invested. But I want to ask him: If it's so important and such a priority—this was the first piece of legislation tabled in this Parliament. The first piece, of course, was An Act to perpetuate an ancient parliamentary right, which is a standard Bill 1 in every new Parliament. So this was the first piece of legislation. Almost a year later, it's still languishing on the order paper. We're in third reading. If the government wants to pass this legislation, bring it to a vote. What in the Sam Hill are they talking about? Give me a break here.

In the afternoon, we're going to be dealing with Bill 30, amendments to the Employment Standards Act. It's already at 12-plus of debate. That's what we're going to be debating this afternoon. In every question period—and you're here for those question periods, Speaker, because I see you and I hear you—the Premier standing across from me keeps saying, "Oh, we're serious about Ornge. We brought forward Bill 50. Why can't we debate it?" We're telling him right now: Bring that bill forward. It's up to you to bring Bill 50 forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew knows we're not discussing Ornge, so keep to Bill 2. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. No, we're not discussing Ornge at this particular time, but we are discussing the priorities of this government, which apply to every piece of legislation, and it is on their insistence that Bill 50 come forward. Well, I say to the Premier: Bring it forward. Put up or shut up. Come on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Where do I start after that particular diatribe? Listen: We, as my colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park said yesterday, generally support this bill. Do we think it's going to make a huge impact on seniors? Probably not, but it will be helpful for

some, there's no question, and for that reason we're going to support it. But there are a whole bunch of things that we could have done to help seniors live out their retirement in some dignity.

For example, all of us in our constituency offices—I don't care what side of the House you're on—get people who say, "I don't make enough money in my pension to decide between being able to afford to buy a prescription or paying my hydro bill." People are struggling, especially those seniors on fixed incomes, in a most difficult way to make ends meet at the end of the day. This particular bill, yes, will help them retrofit their homes if they have the money, but I think there are a whole bunch of other things we should have included in this bill or we should have done as an initiative in order to help seniors.

We are no longer putting up any speakers to this bill, I want to say as the NDP House leader, because we believe we've made our points on this bill. We generally support it, so we're just waiting for the vote to get along. It's rather interesting that the government has not got this particular bill passed yet.

They're able to make an agreement with the Conservative Party to pass probably the most divisive or most controversial bill of this session, and they can't come to an agreement with the Conservatives to pass what is pretty much a fluff bill. I think it reflects on the inability of the government to manage this House.

0930

I understand and respect what the Conservatives are doing. They want to hold this up and continue discussion to make some points. That's fair; that's what debate is all about. That's what this place is. But I think it reflects badly on the government's ability to manage this House when they can't get Bill 2 passed, that was introduced sometime last year. So I look forward to the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Nepean—Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to thank my colleagues from Timiskaming—Cochrane, Timmins—James Bay, York West and, of course, my seatmate from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

While it is very clear that our party is not supportive of half-baked measures that don't help all of the population and are incredibly inaccessible, we do urge this government to act. I mean, this is appalling, that they would wait 11 months to put forward this bill for third reading, after passing legislation with far less scrutiny in this assembly. We feel that it is time they put this type of motion to a vote. It appears as if they are trying to filibuster their own legislation in a week in which they've called back the House a little bit early.

There's one thing I think my colleagues in the NDP and I will agree with, and that is that this government appears to want to be sitting these two weeks to help them in by-elections that will occur tomorrow in Kitchener—Waterloo and Vaughan. I find that very interesting, because this appears, as I've said before, to make them look as if they're doing something. It's about public re-

lations. If they really cared and they wanted to solve this problem of inaccessibility in seniors' homes and they wanted to really do something to make them more healthy, they would have passed this legislation 10 months ago. This has been on the order paper 11 months. It's Bill 2. If it were a priority by this government, they would have passed it. They run the show; they're in charge of orders of the day—certainly not the official opposition, and definitely not the third party. It is that government there.

Speaker, I will end on this note: Get it done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm hearing quite a bit about Bill 2. The government brought it forward—and my esteemed colleague for Nepean—Carleton got it right. She has a very astute, keen sense of what's going on politically here. But Bill 2, as pointed out by the member from Nepean—Carleton, is the flagship of legislation that this government has put forward. If this is supposed to be the defining bill of what this government is, the definition is fluff. It does nothing for the people in my home riding of Northumberland—Quinte West.

You know, I heard the member from York East mention about going to nursing homes and talking to seniors who say to him, "Oh, we wish we could stay in our homes." Well, I'm hearing on the ground back in Northumberland—Quinte West, when I'm out there meeting people and seniors on fixed incomes, that they are trying to stay in their homes, but again, as mentioned earlier, the HST on the electricity and home heating is making it rather difficult, and many of those seniors on fixed incomes are going to have to sell their homes because they can't afford to stay in their homes. So which is it? What is this government actually trying to do?

The member from York West says that if this piece of legislation helps one citizen in the province, then it's done its just. No. We would like to pass legislation in this chamber that actually has more of an impact on all Ontarians, from all political and socioeconomic backgrounds.

So when the government sits here and talks about how it is going to benefit people—it was mentioned by the members from Timiskaming—Cochrane and Timmins—James Bay that the NDP is going to support this bill. I ask those members of the third party, how many constituents in their ridings are actually going to benefit from this bill? Not many, Mr. Speaker.

This piece of legislation does nothing. It's window dressing for this government. It defines what this government has done for the last nine years: nothing to improve the lives and the standard of living for the people not only in Northumberland—Quinte West but in the province of Ontario.

I'm disappointed that this government brings forward legislation that will actually help individuals who can help themselves. Quite frankly, individuals who are going to access this program don't need the help in the first place. If you want to do something that's going to have

an impact—as mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, you are, as the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, putting forward legislation that will actually save lives with sprinkler systems. That is something worth debating and passing, that's going to actually have an impact on the lives of many people across the province. It's going to save lives. That's the kind of legislation we should be debating and discussing, not a frivolous piece of legislation that people aren't going to actually use.

Here we are debating a bill that has been on the slab for 11 months now and finally the government decided to bring it forward. What else are they doing? Bill 50. The government says it wants to push Bill 50 and that we in opposition are stalling it. It's the government that brings forward legislation as they see fit in a timely manner and that they want to debate. When we're facing a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411.4-billion debt, we need to look at legislation that's going to create jobs. That's what my leader, Tim Hudak, and the PC Party are focusing on: job creation. The reforming of the apprenticeship program to a 1-to-1 ratio is going to create 200,000 highly skilled trade jobs here in the province of Ontario. That's the kind of thing, the kind of forward thinking and leadership that this province needs—none of this frivolous legislation that isn't going anywhere to help people like seniors on fixed incomes stay in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, when I was campaigning during the last election, I was in the great town of Brighton—I would encourage all members in the chamber here, if you're ever in Northumberland–Quinte West, stop by Brighton; it's a lovely community—and there was a senior couple who really tugged at my heartstrings. I sat at their kitchen table and they're sitting there, with the wife almost in tears, saying they only had enough savings to stay in their home—which her father had built and where he raised his family; that's where she grew up—enough money for maybe two years, because their energy costs were skyrocketing and their property taxes have skyrocketed under this government. They want to stay in their home; they want to be there until they can no longer function and have to be placed where proper care can be given.

0940

That is something, again, that the NDP—the third party—and ourselves can agree on. We want to make the lives of our constituents that much better by taking the HST off home heating, whether it's electricity or fuel. Keep those seniors on fixed incomes in their homes. That's why I'm here, as a strong voice, advocating and asking this government to please do the right thing when it comes to bringing legislation forward. We really, truly do care, and I believe that my colleagues on the other side of the chamber care, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes we need to listen to the advice of others, because we don't always have the answers ourselves.

When it comes to Bill 2, I would encourage the government to actually look at what the substance of Bill 2 is. You have to ask yourself, Is this actually going to have the type of positive effect that we want to see when we sit here in this chamber and bring forward pieces of

legislation? Is it going to actually have a positive impact on the lives of those seniors who need it most? Quite frankly, I don't think this piece of legislation does that. I think, again, it's posturing. I get the politics, even though I'm new to the chamber here. I understand the politics of what the government does—Putting Students First. Again, coming back to the fancy title, the feel-good title—it makes you feel warm and fuzzy. Who doesn't want to put students first?

I ask the government, when you're bringing legislation forward, to think about the actual legislation that you're putting forward; think about it. Sometimes I get confused as to whether or not the government has actually thought through the impacts that legislation is going to have on the lives of Ontarians. The horse racing industry comes to mind: 60,000 people in Ontario rely on that industry for jobs. Why would the government want to get rid of the horse racing industry, 60,000 jobs? We're trying to create jobs.

I want to just say in closing that I'm opposed to Bill 2, and I thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: When I was first elected, I committed to doing things a little bit differently. What I heard, time and time again, when I was on the campaign trail was that people were sick and tired of the bickering. They were sick and tired of politicians acting like children. As I've said, I've committed to working together. But I have found that that is much easier said than done. It's very difficult, especially when we get bills like this that come forward that do seem quite disingenuous.

In the time I worked in the constituency office of my predecessor, I would have a steady stream of people coming through the door—seniors—who had difficulty maintaining their homes for a variety of reasons. Some of them had older homes; they were no longer working. It's difficult to afford some of the really expensive repairs that homes so often need. I had people coming in for repairs to their roofs, windows, doors, insulation. There was also the matter of making their homes more accessible, so that would be lowering the countertops, putting in the rails, allowing them to have a ramp to come in.

This bill really doesn't address any of that. As the member from Northumberland–Quinte West said, it's really designed to help individuals who can afford to help themselves. The people who can afford to take advantage of this credit really don't need it.

I'm not disputing the \$60 million, because the \$60 million is a fair bit. It's over \$560,000 per riding, which I think could do a lot of good, but not the way that this is designed. Maybe if we had an income threshold; maybe if that was put towards increasing home care. There's a variety of things. So for that reason, I will reluctantly support the bill, but more can be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I am first of all encouraged by the last comments that were made in the Legislature in

terms of support for the bill. I'm disappointed to hear that the official opposition is going to be voting against this particular bill.

Everything that is being done now, I think, in all jurisdictions, is done in the context of the economic circumstances that are there. I have mentioned on many occasions in this House the book written by Dr. Janice MacKinnon, who is the former NDP finance minister in Saskatchewan. I wanted to keep the book away from my friend Dwight Duncan, our present finance minister, because it talks about the tough decisions that had to be made, and I know that all finance ministers face that.

The context of this bill is that we're in challenging economic times. You always would like to do more, and if you're prepared to allocate more funds, then you are able to do more. But within the context of the financial circumstances that confront the province, I think this is a significant bill that will help seniors.

One of the moves we're seeing today that I think is a progressive move—again, in Ontario I see it happening; it's likely happening in other jurisdictions—is the move to try to have seniors stay in their homes a longer period of time. We know that, by and large in our society, people are living longer now, and the challenges we have health-wise often increase as we get older. So I recognize that a bill of this kind, providing some assistance to people to be able to stay in their homes, is going to be well received and is going to be very helpful.

Would governments like to do far more? By gosh, they sure would. But I think this is a significant step forward and one which I would encourage members of the Legislature to vote in favour of.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I was pleased to respond to the member from Northumberland—Quinte West, I think, most appropriately, when he talked about how all of the members here should visit the lovely town of Brighton. I know there's some famous people that come from Brighton. One of them used to be here until the last election; he was the mayor of Brighton at one time, Lou Rinaldi.

But I would only say this: The most impressive comments he made were talking about when he was campaigning as a new candidate and sitting at a kitchen table listening to constituents who were finding it hard to make ends meet in today's Ontario, Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. This bill, if you look at it on the surface, is one of those sound-good bills, but even the NDP member said the people who could benefit from this don't really need this kind of support. It's so true. And then for the people who are duped into it, if you spent—to qualify for the \$10,000, you'd have to spend about \$80,000. Now, the tax on that kind of expenditure would be \$10,000. The HST is 15%; on \$100,000, it would be \$15,000. So you'd be paying \$15,000 in taxes and the government's going to give you back \$10,000. This whole thing is a construct of a very Machiavellian kind of attitude towards fooling people. It's a shell game, technically.

I can only say this: What I've heard from my constituents is the lack of access to long-term care. So what did the McGuinty government do for seniors? They're going to regulate retirement homes. The story on retirement homes is, there isn't five cents in a retirement home from the provincial coffers. However, they've instituted a new charge. It's a seniors tax. When you're a resident in a retirement home now, they're going to charge you about \$15 a month of tax on that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to make three points.

First of all, it will be really interesting to see—and the member from Parkdale—High Park pointed this out—if we look about a year from now, how many people actually got approved under this particular program, because the government is really good at announcing these kinds of programs and making the restrictions as far as applications so tough that not a lot of people actually go through the application. That will be interesting.

0950

I just want to say to the members from the Conservative Party, I hear the argument, "This is not good enough, it doesn't go far enough; therefore, I'm voting against it." Well, you know, jeez, at one point, you've got to—it just seems to me that doesn't cut it with people. I think, in the end, if it does some good, what the heck's wrong with supporting it? It's not as if this is a bad bill. Does anybody in the Conservative caucus believe this is a bill that will hurt seniors? No. I don't think there is. So, on the basis of it at least does some minimal good for the seniors, we should be supporting it. I don't accept that as an argument.

The other point that I just want to make is the Conservatives are really pushing the fact that they want to cost everything out and make sure there are offsets for everything that's going on when expenditures are made in the province of Ontario, and God bless. That's their choice as a political party. But it is the right wing in Ontario—now the Liberal Party is a right-wing party, so I'll lump the Conservatives and Liberals together, because it's clear that the Liberals are trying to cut the grass of the Conservative Party—you're the party that has essentially cost this province \$15 billion in tax cuts. The tax cuts that have been doled out by way of tax cuts to the corporate sector and the most wealthy in this province etc. equal about \$15 billion. Hey, what is the deficit in the province of Ontario? They weren't interested in doing offsets when they were underfunding public services so that they could fail. I just say we've heard this song before. That's something that people shouldn't buy into.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I want to thank the members from Kenora—Rainy River, St. Catharines, my esteemed colleague from Durham and the member from Timmins—James Bay for their insight into this bill.

I think, though, that my esteemed colleague from Durham, Mr. O'Toole, made a very good point in the fact

that what this actually does is create more bureaucracy, more red tape, and this is the type of legislation that's actually preventing Ontario from moving forward, especially when it comes to job creation.

Again, it's going to be as the member from Timmins—James Bay pointed out. I would like to definitely see—and I wait with great anticipation—when the numbers come out as to how many Ontarians actually took advantage of this program that they're rolling out, because quite frankly it's the individuals who can afford it who are going to actually invest in their homes, especially with the uncertainty of the stock market as it is. If I had money to set aside, whether I would invest in my home, building and making renovations so that I can actually increase the value of my home, or put it into the stock market like we do with our RSP contributions, and we get that monthly statement and see how much money we've actually lost on the stock market—the wiser individual would take that money and sure they would make renovations so that life could be a little more comfortable in their homes.

But, again, HST off home heating makes a larger impact on the lives of Ontarians and seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to join this debate because we have to address the real crux of the problem, and this is the fact that the Liberal government is not taking their job seriously. They're actually making a mockery out of this revered House by pulling up a bill, Bill 2, which was first introduced a year ago, when they should be addressing bills that will take on the challenge of real issues that we're facing today.

To put my comments into context, I'd like to quote from an article that was in the Toronto Sun yesterday, and that quote is—and bear with me, Speaker, because, again, it puts in context my comments through my debate here—“By the end of last week, the August 27 ‘emergency recall’ of the Legislature—supposedly to get serious, at last, about Ontario’s fiscal crisis—closed out with all the drama of a damp washcloth.

“It was clear the Liberal government is no more serious about climbing out of the hole it has dug than it was after the last election. It was all a stage play, meant to distract Ontarians from the things the Liberals don't want you thinking about right now—their appalling record of overspending and tripling the debt, of scandal and waste.

“They want you to believe that our massive debt crunch just fell out of the sky.”

Similarly, Bill 2 has just fallen out of the sky to be debated this week. If our Liberal government was serious at all about getting down to business, this government would have called Bill 50 or Bill 115.

Let's talk about Bill 50 just for a second. It was designed to protect the people who are principled, who are trying to draw attention to wrongdoings. But sadly, this government would rather see folks like this be suspended from their jobs as opposed to protecting their rights. This just isn't acceptable, and we have to draw attention to it because it must stop.

Sadly, today, instead of addressing Bill 50 or Bill 115, we're here talking about Bill 2, the healthy homes tax credit. This is just appalling at a time when we, specifically in Huron—Bruce and throughout the province, are facing a very, very serious spending crisis. We simply cannot afford to direct money in this manner when we have unprecedented challenges in our health care system that require long-term vision to come up with affordable solutions. Bill 2, this Liberal bill, will do little to help seniors in my riding of Huron—Bruce. Most seniors cannot afford to spend \$10,000 in order to receive a \$1,500 tax credit.

Because of the Liberals' tax-and-spend ways, our province is in economic crisis, and it's time they faced up to this fact. Credit downgrade after credit downgrade—our fiscal outlook is getting worse and worse each day. Seniors do not have the means to afford costly renovations when they're coping with reality, and that reality is rising costs for the heating of their own homes when they're saddled, over and above that rising cost, with the HST on home heating costs.

There's a far better plan, and that's giving seniors, and indeed all Ontarians, a little bit of a break. That 8% off the cost of home heating to put back in their pockets would mean a lot. Fifteen hundred dollars for a select few is not acceptable. As my colleague Peter Shurman said in this House—he's the PC caucus critic for finance—the percentage of seniors who will benefit from this tax is incredibly small. Mr. Speaker, this bill will only help a very tiny group. It benefits those who can already afford renovations and it does nothing to help, as I said before, seniors who cannot afford to renovate.

Sadly, the McGuinty government could do so much more by helping all families across the board in this province. They could help create business, create jobs. They could cut red tape that causes our province to lose these jobs. They could cut down the size and cost of government and they could ensure accountability and value for taxpayers.

While they propose tax cuts for home renovations over \$10,000 for seniors, people in my riding are wondering if they're going to be able to keep their heat on this winter, especially after, Mr. Speaker—it's appalling to share with you—the McGuinty Liberals announced just a few weeks ago that they would be cutting funding in half to municipal social services, these agencies that help residents pay their utility bills when there's nothing left at the end of the month. They're cutting it in half. What are they thinking?

Last winter I received so many calls from constituents who could not afford to pay their hydro bills, and local county social services agencies were there for them. Now, even that cupboard is going to be bare. I don't know what this winter is going to be like. Unfortunately, the number of families that these agencies will be able to serve will be cut in half because of the Liberals' short-sightedness, their mismanagement and their poor decisions.

Social service agencies were notified last month. I just want to repeat and draw attention to the fact that reduced

funding will start—guess what?—in the middle of winter. This reduced funding is going to start in January, at the height of cold winter temperatures.

They see this as a measure to get the province's debt under control. Half of these funds that they're going to save by cutting social services in municipalities in my riding are going to go to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the other half is going to help pay off the provincial debt—again, bad decisions, mismanagement.

It's time this government stands up and faces the fact that their unaccountability and mismanagement are continuing to drive our seniors and everyone in this province deeper and deeper into a hole.

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I want to talk about just mismanagement for two seconds, Speaker, so bear with me, because my comments that are coming up have bearing on my overall message today. It's the mismanagement and the wasteful spending and the poor decisions that are going to be a burden on the seniors that they're saying this Bill 2 tax credit is going to help.

Another example was just mentioned on CTV London last night. The public learned, if they were watching CTV in London last night, that the Samsung sweetheart deal of \$7 billion has missed yet another extended deadline with respect to its deliverables associated with that \$7-billion sweetheart deal. It was given to them by the Liberal government, and guess what? Mr. Bentley, the Minister of Energy, refused to answer any questions with respect to this missed deadline. Seemingly, as this new season starts, green is the new Ornge, where, unfortunately, unaccountability and avoiding questions is the norm.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): On a point of order, the member from Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make reference to standing order 23(b): "directs his or her speech to matters other than" the bill being discussed. I believe we should be chatting about Bill 2 this morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That seems to be the order of the day. I would ask the member to stick to Bill 2 and not drift anymore, please. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The fact of the matter is that the mismanagement and unaccountability of our Liberal government are causing undue stress on our seniors, and Bill 2 does nothing to alleviate the increased hydro costs, the increased cost of living that, through bad decisions like the sweetheart deal, are being realized as the Liberals continue to see promises broken go on, in terms of missed deadlines.

If the fact of the matter was addressed seriously, how many seniors are really going to benefit from this tax credit? This is a bill that's going to do very little for few people. At the end of the day, as was astutely mentioned just a moment ago, how many people are really going to benefit from this particular bill? Will it even see the light

of day, or is it just going to be another broken promise that we've come to realize from this government?

If the Liberals had made smarter fiscal decisions from the beginning, cutting assistance to the province's most vulnerable would not be necessary to cover a debt that continues to go downhill. Families in Ontario are struggling. They're struggling every day to pay bills and provide necessities for their families. It's time the Liberal government wakes up and realizes this. But, rather, the Liberals would save seats of cabinet ministers and line the pockets of their friends while people in Ontario go without paying their hydro bills.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: You can't say that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you—

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's unparliamentary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. I'll handle that. I would ask the member to withdraw that damning comment.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I withdraw.

The fact of the matter is, in Huron-Bruce, people are suffering. People are broke, just like this province is broke. This tax credit is going to do nothing, as we see the Liberal government squander hard-earned tax dollars away on sweetheart deals. People are suffering, and then you go further and cut in half municipal services that help these people. It's a downloading—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me. When I stand up, you sit down. You do not go across the floor and have debate. You go through me. And I appreciate the government side for not yelling and screaming when I'm trying to move on in this discussion.

I'll now move on for questions and comments. The member from Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening, of course, to the member from Huron-Bruce, a place where I spent two years in ministry, so I just want to give a shout-out to the people at Brucefield and Kippen, where my church was for two wonderful years in the 1990s. Incredible people out there, mainly and mostly farmers, and it's true: They are suffering. Many of them are suffering, and rural poverty is a truism; absolutely. And it's absolutely true that no senior is going to be sent from their house just because they can't put grab bars around their bath or widen their hallway.

Seniors leave their homes for a couple of reasons. These are the two: Number one, because they can't afford to pay their bills any more in the home—or renters, of course; and number two, because they need human help, they need home care. This bill addresses neither of those issues. Neither of those issues is addressed. The member is absolutely right, and so is the member from Timmins-James Bay, when he said that we would love to see—in fact, we would ask the government to table, after a year or two of this bill being passed, because I know it

will, how many seniors have actually taken up this program, and how much of that so-called \$60 million is actually spent on this program.

My suspicion is that very, very few will want to know about it, will find out about it or take advantage of it. And the people who do are not the seniors who live in poverty that really need this government's help; those seniors will be left untouched by this bill. Those with \$10,000 to spend, who spend their winters in Florida: Yes, maybe one or two of those will take this up. But for the vast majority of seniors, this bill is a do-nothing. It's not going to help. It's not going to hurt; it's not going to help.

I listened to the member from Huron-Bruce. I certainly know, because I lived there for a couple of years, that poverty is a reality amongst seniors in rural areas, and this bill will not help them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I've been listening to the member from Huron-Bruce. I can appreciate that she's a new member of the House. I can appreciate that she sits in the opposition, and I have learned some things, as a member that once sat in the opposition, that you can blurt, you can say anything, any nonsense you want to say, because you're not in government. But it's not fair. That is not fair, Speaker.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would argue that that is impugning motive onto members, and I don't think that's very helpful.

Mr. Mario Sergio: You didn't let me finish speaking.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'll remind the member from York West that we don't tolerate personal attacks. You will stick to Bill 2. If you don't like the comments, you will do it accordingly.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Mr. Speaker, I was not attacking a member of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pardon me; it's my decision that you were. You will now proceed in a normal manner.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Speaker, the ghosts of Mike Harris are all over this chamber here. I remember that in 1995, the day they were elected, they cut social services by 21%. They totally cut out all the affordable housing. They told women, "hula hoops." So we can't say that this government has not been doing anything for seniors.

Let me address some of the benefits that our seniors are enjoying today because of this particular government. These are some of the benefits that will benefit all Ontarians. We have a tax credit for seniors up to \$1,025 yearly and \$200 annually for personal income tax cuts. We have the seniors in the north. They're enjoying another \$200 in tax cuts. Property tax grants, up to \$675 a year—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'll remind the member from York West that once I say you're done, you're done. Don't continue on.

The member from Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to listen to my colleague from Huron-Bruce and her many good points during her past 10-minute speech.

Three weeks ago, I went home a bit to the Ottawa area. My ancestors settled there, in Nepean-Carleton, in the 1820s. I went to the archives there and visited with some of the people that were working there. Not one of them spoke of this bill. The only thing they spoke about was the Green Energy Act and how it was invading their town and their community, and they wanted it stopped. There was nobody who said anything about this bill.

It's interesting that if business operated the same way this government did in trying to get something done, they'd probably be out of business by the time it was done. It was 11 months ago that this bill was introduced, I believe. I come from a farming community, and we'd certainly all starve to death if things didn't get done a little quicker than this.

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I also want to point out that this program will be in the \$60-million range if it's fully implemented. This government doesn't have \$60 million to throw away right now. I believe that we have to start controlling our costs. If we don't start doing that, we are going to end up with a \$30-billion deficit faster than we think we are, plus our debt load is going to increase to over \$400 billion. To spend money at a time like this on a program that probably isn't going to be used that much by seniors does not make sense to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to join in the debate and comment mostly on the comments from my colleague from Huron-Bruce and from my colleague from Parkdale-High Park.

Two of the main things that force seniors out of their homes are that they can't afford to pay the bills and they can't get home care. My mom would be one of those examples. She lives in her own home, and the bills are catching up to her. My mom is disabled. My mom could use this program, but is this program going to keep my mom in her house? No—and that's the difference.

Yes, this program will help some people. One thing I take offence to is that what we can't spend money on—we have a debt. We have to prioritize where we spend the money, not just cut, cut, cut, because if we can keep people like my mom in their houses longer, we will save the overall system money. To say, "We can't spend money here," is that a reason why we should spend money on programs that won't benefit the majority? No. Is this a good program? Is this the best program that could have been developed? No. Is this a program that will help some seniors? Yes. Could we create much better programs, and could we look at the overall picture? Because the overall picture is, we have to be able to treat people with dignity and do it within our means, and not just by creating programs that make good press releases.

At the end of the day, this program will pass. We're hoping to see actual numbers to prove to us and prove to the people of Ontario that this program is actually made

for the benefit of seniors and not for the benefit of the governing party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Huron–Bruce has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate your indulgence today. This is a very emotional topic because we're talking about people we really care about and we hold close to our hearts, just as we've heard from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I appreciate the comments from our member from Parkdale–High Park. We totally agree, in the sense of how many seniors truly will benefit from this at the end of the day a year or two from now. I think we all know what that answer is going to be, so we need to stop wasting our time on this and address bills that will really seek out answers and proper steps, such as Bill 50 and Bill 115, instead of stalling them and putting up smoke and mirrors.

In terms of the comments from our MPP from York West, I think all we have to say is that we agree to disagree on this, because the reality is, when we're spending \$1.8 million an hour on debt that has grown over the last nine years, not 15 years ago, not 25 years ago, but in the last nine years, it's unacceptable to me, my family, my riding and the rest of the people in Ontario.

I really appreciate the comments from our member from Perth–Wellington, and he's absolutely right. At the end of the day, when we're out talking to our constituents, nobody knows about or cares about Bill 2. They care about how much money is left in their pockets.

As our member from Timiskaming–Cochrane pointed out, we have to be really basic about this and live within our means. My goodness, when we're squandering dollars on scandals like eHealth and Omge, dare I say, or even the new Green Energy Act and the sweetheart deals that are going down the proverbial hill, we are no longer living within our means. We have to get back to the basics. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa Centre on a point of order.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. Standing order 23(h) provides that a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he makes allegations against another member. I rise today, Speaker, to seek some advice from you. Clearly, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga made an allegation yesterday that public assets were used for partisan purposes. Let's be clear, Speaker: The member admits he has no proof of the allegation he made. We confirmed with the Ministry of Natural Resources, who manage the government's aircraft, that the King Air plane has not taken off, or landed, at Waterloo regional airport during this by-election. Further, it has not taken off or landed at—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Stop the clock. As a reminder to all members, when I stand, it gets quiet.

There was a question on that yesterday. It's part of the debate. It's not a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will try it again, but I would also use this as a reminder for all members to use this place with the proper decorum that we've always asked for. We talk about ideas, not about people.

APPOINTMENT OF HOUSE OFFICERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to bring to the attention of members of the House the following appointments that have been made to the list of officers who serve the House. Trevor Day and Anne Stokes have been appointed clerks-at-the-table. As table officers, they will serve the members in a permanent capacity and assist the Clerk and Deputy Clerk in providing procedural advice to the Speaker and to the members.

I am certain that all members will join me in congratulating Mr. Day and Ms. Stokes as they assume their new responsibilities. Congratulations, and welcome to the House. Now you're in for it.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would also like to take the opportunity to address the House on the issue—and on a serious note, I do ask for your attention—of the use of electronic devices in the chamber. As the members will know, there is a nominal prohibition of the use of any communication devices in the House. However, the practice has developed whereby the Speaker will overlook members using certain devices as long as their use is silent, unobtrusive and not complained about by other members. Members may not read directly from these devices while they have the floor, as is the practice, nor may the telephone or camera functions ever be used.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I will ask that your interjections stop.

I remind members of these restrictions as a result of having certain infractions drawn to my attention, notably photos being taken and repeated instances of ringing phones on the floor of the House. I ask all members to ensure their phones are on silent mode whenever they are in the chamber and to observe current practice while at their places in this chamber, in particular, the prohibition against using a camera function.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier this morning. Back in the spring, Premier, when you

were working on a budding relationship with the NDP, my party and my leader were providing advice you needed. You grabbed the budget lifeline from the NDP at that time. How's that working out for you?

Now we're bailing you out on your teachers' legislation. The PC Party stands alone as the one group with a proper plan and a compass. We know where Ontario has to go: controlling costs, dealing with an out-of-control public sector, fixing arbitration, sourcing services privately where that is advantageous—all ideas that we have put forward, all ideas you have rejected. Now, absent any indication via a yet-to-be-tabled fall economic statement, McGuinty's Ontario is a rudderless ship with you at the helm wanting the NDP to get down below and row.

Will you finally admit, Premier, that the PC Party has been the only constant and that you should have listened to us last spring instead of partnering up with the NDP and throwing bricks at us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Again, as a reminder: When I stand, you sit.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: And I thought we were friends, Speaker. I thought we were friends. We were working so well together on the Putting Students First legislation.

Speaker, our responsibility in a minority position, of course, is to find common ground whenever we can. Sometimes we have to tack a little bit to the left, other times we have to tack a little bit to the right, but overall, we're charged with moving forward.

One of the things that we are particularly responsible for is ensuring that we bring forward workable solutions. I would say to my honourable colleague, with all sincerity, that they have put forward many solutions which are simply unworkable.

We remain very much interested in continuing to work with them on a number of fronts, but if they bring forward some workable solutions, then, of course, we will be very interested in sitting down with them and finding a way to move those forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: For over eight years, Premier, you've governed by photo op and political opportunism, while Ontario's debt and deficit grew to historic proportions.

This past spring, you introduced a budget that ignored Ontario PC recommendations to freeze government wages across the board and bring some semblance of even-handedness to the way Ontario's finances are managed. You delayed implementing a wage freeze until you decided to scream "Fire," and that was roughly two weeks ago.

Your party delayed doing what was necessary in the spring budget, just like the NDP is now delaying and obstructing legislation to implement a wage freeze for one segment of the public sector. Meanwhile, the Ontario

PC Party is the only party that has been consistent in providing leadership that Ontario needs to get us out of the mess you got us into. When will you finally take advice from the official opposition and steer Ontario back on course?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, as you might imagine, I see things a little bit differently. My interpretation of recent events in this Legislature was, at first, the PCs were missing in action. They went subterranean. Only recently have they surfaced. They've decided that it's in the public interest that we engage, wherever possible, together in developing good public policy. They made some specific requests for changes in our Putting Students First legislation. We adopted those recommendations, and now we are working together.

Again, if there are workable solutions, we are more than interested in receiving those and finding common ground, but if they are unworkable, like so many of those solutions put forward by the PCs, then we simply can't go there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Premier, you shovelled money at the teachers' unions for eight years, and they supported you and your party in every election bid. What a coincidence.

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The unions may not like the medicine we prescribe, but at least they know where we stand. You know where we stand. Ontarians know where we stand. The NDP would spend us into oblivion, and you're just as happy to let us drift into oblivion.

The Ontario PC Party is the only constant. We know how to steer the ship. When are you getting on board?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that's really a rant dressed up as a question. Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm, but I disagree strongly with the underlying philosophy. In the context of that question, of course, there was yet another attack on unions and the union movement in Ontario. That's not an approach we can support. We think it's important that we all work together in the greater public interest.

We also say, in contrast to the NDP, that it is time for us to call a halt to wage increases. We think the most important way to get there, the responsible way to get there, is, ideally, at first through negotiation. But as we made clear in our last budget, if that should fail us, if we can't achieve our fiscal objectives by means of negotiation, then we'll resort to other measures, as we have with respect to education in Ontario and our Putting Students First legislation.

Again, I appreciate the enthusiasm offered by my honourable colleague, but unless it's a workable solution, we simply can't work with them.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Also to the Premier: After nine years of giving away the farm, you are only now realiz-

ing the fiscal mess you've created because your hand-some benefits and your wage increases to public sector unions are unsustainable. Your record, sir, is worse than Bob Rae's NDP, and now you count on Bob Rae's next generation of NDP MPPs to pass your high-tax, high-spend ways.

In contrast, last July, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record said that only the Ontario PC Party has a comprehensive plan for where Ontario needs to go to get us back on track. Will you stop digging a deeper hole with the NDP, Premier? Will you follow our lead? Will you take our ideas to fix the economy, and will you support our plan for a broader public sector wage freeze across all government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I am proud that we were able, working with this Legislature, to pass a budget. I applaud the third party for making that process work, as difficult as I know it was.

I would invite the members opposite in the Conservative Party to work with us. For instance, Bill 50, to improve accountability at Ornge, has been awaiting approval by this Legislature. I wish you'd let it come. We called it Friday and you wouldn't let it come forward.

Bill 2 is in committee this morning at third reading, the healthy home renovation, a tax cut for our senior citizens. Why won't you let it pass? It's been there for five months.

We've laid out a clear plan. It's getting Ontario back to balance and has fixed the mess in education and health care that that member and her party left as a legacy to this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The sinkhole on Highway 174 in the city of Ottawa is on solid ground, compared to this minister. Ontario needs to get back on the right track after we've been on the beaten one for the past nine years. We can't afford any more Ontario Liberal and Ontario NDP budgets.

Will you shut down your PR campaigns? Will you stop playing games with Kitchener-Waterloo voters? Will you admit that your last-minute conversion to public sector wage freezes is actually Tim Hudak's idea, and will you follow us the full way? Will you follow us to a broader public sector wage freeze, and will you commit to it today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would refer the honourable member to the budget. That budget in fact represents a clear path back to balance in a timely fashion. In fact, unlike some governments in the country right now, we are meeting the targets we laid out. Expenditure management is part of that, but where we part company is in our priorities. That member wants to continue funding horse racing. We want to fund full-day learning.

That member and her party one day talk about—they stand up in this House and ask us to spend money over here, and then earlier in question period, they say, "Don't spend money." We've laid out a clear plan that gets us to balance in a fair and responsible way and protects the important gains we've made in our schools and in our health care system that will ensure Ontario has a great future, which it does, because of the work of all Ontarians, including members of this Legislature in at least two out of the three parties.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I'd really like to agree with him, but then we'd both be wrong, and Ontario can't afford any more wrong-headed policies from that Liberal government and their NDP cronies to the left. They couldn't even get a wage freeze right with teachers or doctors.

Take the education sector. We're going to bail them out on Bill 115. School started yesterday, and their so-called wage freeze bill is still before the assembly. But guess what, Speaker? No strike. Why? Because their sense of urgency could only be masked for so long. It was a manufactured crisis to distract voters in Kitchener-Waterloo from nine years of mismanagement. This proves they govern more for public perception than they do for public policy.

Is this what we can expect for 3,999 more—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod:—collective bargaining agreements: more public relations stunts, more photo ops and more stunts? Or can we count on this Premier to stand in his place, agree with Tim Hudak—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod:—and put in place a broader public sector wage—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. And I wish everyone would stop when I stand.

Mr. David Zimmer: Throw somebody out, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I could start with you.

Be your own judges of the condition of this place. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It looks like the leadership has already started over there, even in advance.

We have laid out a budget which gets us back to balance. We required the support of the third party, who I know were not able to vote for it in its entirety because they don't agree with it.

The people of Ontario have given us a mandate to govern in a minority situation. We will continue to work with the opposition, whether it's the third party or the second party, where we can find common ground that moves Ontario forward. We think that's important. We will continue to build on our education and health care

achievements, working with whoever will assist us in that manner.

I wish the member would check the rhetoric at the door and work hard to build a better Ontario.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. For the last three weeks, the people of Ontario have watched with weariness as this government has devoted all of its energy towards winning back majority power and little energy to the challenges that are facing everyday people.

They're worried about their jobs. They're worried about the cost of everyday life. They're worried about whether they can have a doctor. The question that people are asking, though, is, why is the Premier more concerned about winning majority power?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague may not believe in the value of education and our shared responsibility to support it and ensure that it's maintained in a stable and predictable way. My honourable colleague may not believe that it's time to hit the pause button when it comes to teacher pay—and broader public sector pay, for that matter, as well. But we do believe in those kinds of things. They may not be easy to do, but we are saddled with a heavy responsibility in government, and we will gladly embrace that continuing responsibility.

When it comes to the teachers' issue in particular, I am mindful of the fact that school began yesterday in earnest across the province. Teachers were there with enthusiasm, committed to their responsibilities.

We commend them for that, and at the same time we're making it clear we've got to hit the pause button when it comes to pay.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's kind of ironic: People have heard the Premier's claims of a crisis in school for weeks, but they notice that he is more focused, and has been more focused, on creating turmoil than anything else—particularly more focused on creating turmoil than actually solving any problems.

Yesterday—he's right—kids started class, and it was really clear that the Premier's threats were nothing more than a desperate, desperate attempt to pick up by-election votes. Does the Premier really think that people are impressed by these desperate manoeuvres?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The only individual around here who seems enamoured with the word "crisis" is my honourable colleague the leader of the NDP.

But I'm pleased and proud to talk about the progress that we're making in education province-wide. Of course, Speaker, you know that test scores are up by 16 points; graduation rates are up by 14 points; university enrolment is up by 26% in Ontario—that's double the national average. In the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo, in the Waterloo region I guess it is, there are 102 full-day kindergarten classes there at 31 schools. That speaks to

our commitment to early learning in that community. Funding has dramatically increased in all the school boards there. We have funded 461 new support staff and some 400 new teachers right across the region.

So we're definitely moving in the right direction when it comes to education, not only in that community but indeed across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ten years ago, the Premier was elected with a mandate to bring change. But when families look at him now, they see the same old politics that he used to rail against: negative campaigning, playing the politics of division, cynical attempts to buy support with public money. Is the Premier so desperate to get majority power that he has completely lost touch with the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Of course, I see things a little bit differently. I would remind my honourable colleague of some of the progress that we've made in other areas that are so important to families. When it comes to health care in that particular community, Waterloo region, there are now 134 more doctors; there are four family health teams serving over 100,000 patients. Wait times are down in both surgeries and diagnostics. There have been significant new investments in renovations and expansions—the Grand River Hospital, St. Mary's, and there's ongoing work at the Cambridge hospital.

So I think all in all, we've been making genuine progress and working with families and working with communities, not just in that riding alone, but indeed in every riding right across the province.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. I want to ask the Premier about some of the challenges facing the people that the government has been ignoring. As the Premier knows, his corporate tax giveaways haven't created jobs or economic growth. We've put forward a positive plan over here to ensure that tax incentives actually go to companies that are creating jobs, not companies that are laying people off. When are we going to see some action to actually reward the job creators in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would encourage my honourable colleague to take a good, long, hard look at the continuing growth that's taking place in the Ontario economy. Employment has gone up by 350,000 jobs, from a low in June 2009. So my honourable colleague understands, that's 90,000 more than we had originally lost. Our economy has grown 7.5% over the past 11 quarters since the end of the recession. Our GDP is 2.6% bigger today than it was before the recession, so we have a larger, stronger economy. Consumer spending has increased during the past 10 consecutive quarters, which is a demonstration of optimism on the part of Ontarians themselves. I'll end on this point: Manufacturing sales are today over 30% higher than they were during the

recessionary low. So we're definitely headed in the right direction—more work, but in the right direction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier can lay out all the stats that he wants, some of them old stats, but the bottom line is he needs to talk to the people of this province who are suffering because they can't find a job, and there's a heck of a lot of them, Speaker.

Families across Ontario, though, are concerned about other things than jobs.

They're also concerned about whether they can get the health care they need when they need it. In Kitchener-Waterloo, where the Premier is going to be campaigning later on today, 20,000 people are without a family doctor. We've put forward some positive proposals to invest in home care and to help relieve the pressure on family doctors and hospitals.

Is the Premier ready to get working on those challenges, or is he going to continue to focus on winning back his majority power?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, there's more work to be done. I think we all would acknowledge that. But I think it's also equally important to acknowledge that we're making progress.

Let me tell you about a great story in the riding of Kitchener-Waterloo, related to a company called Desire2Learn. They just received \$80 million in venture capital funding. That's the biggest funding for—

Hon. Brad Duguid: For an ICT firm.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty:—an information communication technology start-up in the province of Ontario, ever. They have 560 employees; they've added 210 since the beginning of this year. They provide an online learning service. It's being used in the US and other parts of the world, Speaker. It started here in Ontario, right in the heart of KW. We're pleased and proud of that progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people know that these are tough times, but they wanted a balanced approach to balancing the books. The Premier talked about controlling costs and living within our means, but time and again Ontario's families have watched this government approve unjustifiable giveaways. Today, we saw government MPPs scramble to hide the cost of private power deals from the Ontario auditor. Earlier this summer, we learned that 98% of public sector executives and managers are getting bonuses. If the Premier is genuinely interested in balance, why is he so studiously ignoring these concerns?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I had the opportunity last night, yet again, to participate in a tele-town hall, which is a great innovation, and I'm sure my honourable colleagues have all had the opportunity to participate in this kind of thing. One of the questions—and without fail, Speaker, somebody is always going to ask a question about elementary and secondary education, and post-secondary education and the costs. I was pleased and proud, yet again, to tell young people about our 30%-off Ontario

tuition grant. This year, it will save university students close to \$1,700 and it will save our college students close to \$800. That helps families in a very real and meaningful way. At the same time, it helps us build a stronger foundation for a competitive workforce, which is exactly what we need to compete in a global economy.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, when the mess at Ornge was revealed, you claimed that there would be ample opportunity for members of the public accounts committee to question witnesses. When questioned yesterday, you tried to shrug off your repeated refusals to appear. We get it. You refuse to testify, even against the best advice from your friends at the Toronto Star. Premier, what's equally troubling is why you would direct one of your senior political staff to refuse as well. We know that Sophia Ikura has also refused to attend committee hearings and testify. It's obvious you don't want to give evidence, but why are you ordering senior political staff to not testify as well? What do they know that you don't want them to tell?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I say again to my honourable colleague, I think that so far, including this question, there have been 477 questions put in question period related to Ornge. There have been countless questions put forward by the media. They've had 57 witnesses who have appeared before the committee. The committee has done its work for some 89 hours. It has performed that work over the course of 17 days. They've examined thousands of pages of documents, and they've generated nearly 1,000 pages of Hansard.

I understand that the PCs desire that the Ornge committee continue its work for the next two years. I think that is unreasonable, I think it is unrealistic, but more importantly, I think it is irresponsible. I believe it's time for the committee to provide this government with specific recommendations that we might adopt and improve oversight at Ornge.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I didn't detect an answer there.

However, Premier, both you and the Minister of Health received a detailed briefing document in January 2011 on the web of for-profit companies Ornge was setting up. Ms. Ikura was serving as the senior adviser to the Minister of Health at the time. And when the report on patient safety concerning air ambulance service in Ontario was presented to cabinet in May 2012, she was working in your office, serving as your senior health adviser.

She doesn't make the decision not to testify before that committee on her own. Why did you direct her to refuse? What do you know that she knows that you don't want the rest of us to know?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I have not directed anybody in this regard. What I will inform my honourable colleague, and I know he will want to appreciate this fact, is Ms. Ikura is now eight and a half months pregnant. Today she's attending her doctor for a regularly scheduled appointment. So I know they like to see ghosts around all corners, but the fact of the matter is I think it's time to move beyond the games, beyond the partisanship, into the realm of public interest, which demands that we receive recommendations from the committee that we might carefully consider and that we might adopt so that we can bring greater oversight to bear over Ornge.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. It's very clear that the government wants to sweep any bad news under the rug. This morning, at the public accounts committee, I was very disturbed to see the Liberal members repeatedly thwarting our attempts to have the Auditor General look into the cancelled gas plants. We already know that cancelling the Mississauga gas plant cost taxpayers \$190 million. Why is the government trying to hide how many millions of dollars Ontarians will be on the hook for for the Oakville power plant?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As soon as we were able to negotiate a resolution—and the Mississauga gas plant is now moving to Sarnia-Lambton—we provided the costs, we provided the documents, and further issues are before the Speaker; we'll continue to do that.

I know there's a debate before public accounts which has not yet concluded, and I know that committee is getting some good advice from the auditor, and of course whatever the committee and the auditor decide, we'll obviously comply with. As soon as there's a resolution to Oakville, I'm happy to speak to that as well and provide the numbers, of which there aren't any at the moment. We haven't found a resolution, so there is no final number—we'll provide the details and provide the number.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question again is to the Premier. The public accounts committee, as you are all aware, is also looking into Ornge. Every day we are shocked to hear more and more about how deep this scandal goes. We're hearing further tales of potentially illegal practices at Ornge. This afternoon, I'll be requesting that public accounts continue to meet to get to the bottom of this scandal.

My question is this: Will the Premier, will this government, agree to allow this committee to continue so we can get to the bottom and find out what the truth is of Ornge?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the government House leader, please.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I think it's worth repeating: All of us should remember that the public accounts committee

has now sat for 81 hours; by this afternoon, will have heard from 57 witnesses; 477—now 478—questions that have been asked. The committee has sat for 17 days and produced over 800 pages of transcript. The Ornge situation is one that is serious. The government has taken action on a number of fronts, and we look to the public accounts committee to come forward with good advice and good recommendations that we will work on.

I know that the summer days are still upon us and fishing season is not yet over, but I think it's time that the members of the public accounts committee stopped this fishing trip and got down to providing the government with the type of advice that we need to make sure that proper oversight of agencies like this happens in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. To be clear, I stopped the clock, and I wanted to take a second to explain something that just happened. There would normally not have been the ability for the minister to refer the question because the supplementary question was somewhat different than the first question. By way of explanation, I permitted that to happen. Normally the question and the supplementaries must be on the same topic, but because it slightly changed, the minister had to refer it to the House leader. That's why I did what I did.

New question.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question today is for the Minister of Education. Minister, last week the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board was placed under supervision by the Ministry of Education. I know that the board has been struggling for a long time. The board has a long history of failing to meet its targets. My constituents need to know that the board is financially stable so they can put students first. Minister, can you please explain why you took this action?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member from Windsor West. She has been active in advocating on behalf of students in her community, and for that I thank her.

The member is right, Speaker. In spite of extensive support from the Ministry of Education over many years, the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board has struggled to balance its budget. In fact, during five out of the past six years, the board has failed to balance its budget. I have appointed a supervisor following the recommendations of an investigative team from Deloitte that noted the school board's inability to meet its financial obligations. The investigator's report found that there were issues in the board related to inadequate financial management practices and inaccurate budgeting. The report also noted that the board was willing to have teachers go on strike in order to meet their budget obligations, and Speaker, I found that to be very concerning. Supervision will help put the board back on track so that they can make responsible decisions in the best interests of all the students in the community of Windsor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Minister, for that response. My supplementary question is also for the Minister of Education.

My constituents understand the need to take strong action to put students first. I hear from families in my riding how important world-class schools and programs like full-day kindergarten are to them. They tell me how important it is to them that the school year continue. But I've heard some confusion as to what this supervision of the board means to them. Minister, can you please explain what impact supervision will have on parents and families in my riding?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: First, let me assure the parents of the Windsor-Essex Catholic students and the staff of that board that the welfare of the school system is our absolute top priority. The board needs stability and solid financial controls in place so that it can focus on its main job of putting students first.

One of the responsibilities of the supervisor will be to keep students, parents and staff informed, and we will work to ensure that parents continue to have input and a meaningful role in decision-making at this board. The supervisor will seek input from board trustees and senior administration and then consult with staff, parents and families. The supervisor will then release a report publicly which will outline a plan for getting this board back on track, Speaker. We're committed to putting this board back on track so that it can put students first in its community and so that the public can once again have confidence in this board.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. It seems obvious to everyone outside of your government that there was something strange going on at Ornge. Let me read directly from Ornge's annual report. "The very idea of generating our own funds was shocking to many. We have analyzed every option at our disposal, with no limits and no boundaries." We now know, Speaker, what "no boundaries" meant.

The annual report then describes Ornge's road show, which includes an episode on American Choppers where an Ornge motorcycle was built and bought and then brought to the Late Show with David Letterman. Premier, are these the kind of antics you're afraid you would have to answer for at the Ornge committee hearings?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to say I'm a bit surprised at the question, because it seems like there's a bit of a time warp here. We have made it very clear: We acknowledge that oversight at Ornge was not what it ought to have been. We have acknowledged that the leadership at Ornge was not doing its job. That is why we have made the changes there that we have, and that is why the public accounts committee is hearing from front-line workers that things are getting a lot better at Ornge.

I think it's important that we do take the next step as a Legislature, that we pass Bill 50. I think it's also important that the public accounts committee brings forward its recommendations.

Things are moving forward at Ornge. I do think that as we implement each and every one of the Auditor General's recommendations, we would benefit from the findings of the public accounts committee, so I'd like to see those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My supplementary is again to the Premier. Let me read yet another paragraph from that Ornge annual report. "Ornge has strong support from the province, and a high degree of integration with the provincial health system...."

Premier, you may want to distance yourself from the Ornge scandal today, but no one held up the annual report back then that showed you were joined at the hip and said, "Hey, that's not us." I'm sorry, but you're in the thick of it. Denying knowledge today simply doesn't cut it.

Premier, are you concerned that your intimate knowledge of the workings of Ornge will come out? Is that why you won't testify at the Ornge committee hearings?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Perhaps the member opposite hasn't been listening, so let me give him a bit of an update on where we are in improving things at Ornge.

We've got now 217 paramedics working at Ornge; that's 10 more than we did last year at this time. We're at the full complement of airplane pilots. We've got now 74 helicopter pilots, at 95% of the complement. We are very, very pleased that Bruce Farr has joined Ornge. He's a special adviser, operations. He's got over 30 years' experience with EMS here in Toronto. We've got Robert Giguere as special adviser, aviation. He's a pilot who served in executive positions with Air Canada and Sky-service.

We've got, as a new day has dawned at Ornge, new leadership moving forward. If this party actually cares about patients more than politics, it would move forward on passing Bill 50 and getting us the recommendations from public accounts.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. ONTC workers have requested to charter the Northlander train for a special goodbye, for a goodbye run on September 22. The train is available. The staff have volunteered their time. They even offered to pay for the train.

ONTC employees want to offer northerners a final goodbye with a customer appreciation ride. Why are you saying no?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The ONTC decision was a very, very difficult decision. We understand that there's a lot of emotion and a lot of history attached to the divestment of the ONTC.

The reality is that the divestment of the ONTC and the involvement of the private sector will ensure that over the short term and the long term, there will be a better transportation system in place along the Highway 11 corridor. It will be one that will be more efficient, it will be one that will be more effective, and it will be one that, over both the short term and the long term, will be a more sustainable system and a better system in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: My question again to the Premier: We had a train. Now we have promises.

Northerners weren't consulted on the divestment process. The government cancelled the train without warning, tried to silence northerners' protests, and now they won't even let us say goodbye to the Northlander.

Why does this government disrespect northerners so much that they won't even give us a chance to say goodbye to our lifeline to the rest of the province? Premier, what have you got against northerners?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker, over the course of the short term and the long term that this government has been in place, we have made unparalleled investments in northern Ontario. Why? Because we believe in northern Ontario.

Just to correct a few facts: They had prior warning. On March 29, when we announced the divestment, we said that the Northlander would be shut down. We're moving ahead with that. We said that as the different lines came up for sale, they would be put up for sale. We're moving ahead with that and with regard to Ontera. The reality is that at the end of the day, we are going to ensure that we have a system in place that is effective, efficient, affordable and that will serve the present and long-term needs of the people of northeastern Ontario along the Highway 11 corridor.

SENIORS' TAX CREDIT

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last November, the minister introduced Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit, for Ontario seniors. In my riding of York South-Weston, many constituents are wondering what the status is of this important piece of legislation. They are wondering what is taking so long for it to pass and become law. Some have even delayed renovations to their homes because they don't know if they will receive the proposed tax credit. These renovations are to help accommodate their changing lifestyle needs so they can live at home longer. Can you explain why this Legislature is taking so long to pass Bill 2?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I want to thank the member for the question. This bill, the healthy homes tax credit, was introduced so seniors can stay healthy in their homes. It gives them a tax credit on renovations they make to make it easier for them to stay at home. It's a very straightforward bill. There has been bell ringing here in the House; there have been antics in the com-

mittee which have delayed that bill at each stage of debate.

The tax credit is completely offset, involves no new spending and is targeted and will have the added benefit of creating some 10,500 jobs. The Conservative Party has blocked this bill at every stage. The bill is before committee for third reading. Mr. Speaker, we need this bill passed. It's in the interests of seniors—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's a lie, you know.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister for that explanation. I'm pleased that this government is ready to work and ready to put seniors first. I hope, really, that all members of this Legislature will work together to ensure the passage of this piece of legislation. This is a very important bill that will help improve the lives of many seniors throughout our constituencies. The tax credit, as you know, will allow seniors to claim a refundable tax credit of \$1,500 for their renovation expenses, and it will be a huge step in helping seniors to live longer in their homes. So it should be passed as soon as possible.

Could you please explain to our seniors the work it took to get this bill through committee and back to the House for third reading?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: After days of unnecessary delays during clause-by-clause review, representatives of Ontario seniors' groups came to Queen's Park to witness first-hand the tactics of the opposition in delaying this bill. The stakeholders were so disgruntled and agitated, they could not contain their frustration. Finally, thanks to their persistence, the members of the opposition got permission from their leader to let the bill proceed.

Here's what the member for Durham had to say in committee, and is on the record: "Out of respect for you here this morning"—speaking to the seniors' group—"... I spoke with Tim Hudak as well as Jim Wilson, our House leader, a few moments ago in the recess. We're not going to be obstructionist because of your time and your frustration. So it's in that vein that we're not going to delay it any further."

1120

Mr. Speaker, they acknowledged on the record that they obstructed that bill. Please let that bill come out of committee—don't let the member for Durham hang out there in the breeze with senior citizens—and pass that tax—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ahem. Thank you. New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you've refused our many demands to testify at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and finally come clean about your central role in the Ornge scandal. You won't heed our calls to do the right thing, but maybe you'll listen to your health minister. Speaking about the importance of witnesses testifying, here's what she said on May 16: "Speaker, there are questions that need answers and we're happy that the committee is meeting." And this from April 25: "I think it's important that members of this Legislature do have the ability to ask those questions, and I'm glad that this process is now under way, Speaker."

So, Premier, can you explain why the standard your government holds every other potential witness to somehow doesn't apply to the guy in charge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, the public accounts committee has sat for 81 hours and, by this afternoon, will have heard from 57 witnesses.

The Minister of Health, who is the spokesperson for this government on the Ornge issue, has not only taken action in terms of cleaning up the problems at Ornge, bringing forward a bill, Bill 50, which members of the opposition refused to pass, but she has appeared in front of Ornge not once, not twice, but three times, including twice in the same day, to offer an exhaustive explanation of the incidents related to Ornge, and, more importantly, the steps that this government has taken.

As I said, fishing season may not be over yet, but I think it's time that the opposition parties started to concentrate on coming forward with recommendations about Ornge and the oversight of agencies like that for the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm going to try to go back to the Premier. Premier, since you're refusing to finally show some leadership and answer the committee's questions, maybe you'll answer this one: Why? Why won't you appear? Is it because you don't think the hundreds of millions of wasted taxpayers' dollars are worth your time? Is it because you don't think your fuzzy memory about your meetings with Chris Mazza deserves clarity? Or is it because you don't feel accountable to the families who lost loved ones under Ornge's care or while they were waiting for it? Or are you just afraid that some extended time at the committee will lay bare the fact that your lack of leadership and oversight on this file extends from the health minister's desk right into your lap?

Hon. John Milloy: You know, Mr. Speaker, the drive-by smears—earlier today, we had someone who stood up and insulted a young woman who's eight and a half months pregnant and has a medical appointment this afternoon.

The fact of the matter is the public accounts committee has had an exhaustive investigation, and you know

some of the names that have come out, Mr. Speaker? Kelly Mitchell, a top PC lobbyist close to Tim Hudak; Lynne Golding, a prominent Conservative lawyer; Jacob Blum, a top Ornge executive who also happened to be a PC campaign manager; Guy Giorno, a name that the opposition will know very well, who was up to his neck in terms of the Ornge situation; we've heard about Rick Potter, a Conservative candidate in Thunder Bay.

Mr. Speaker, the public accounts committee has spent weeks and weeks and weeks looking into this. What we are asking them and what we are asking the opposition party—all members of the committee—is to come forward with recommendations on how we can strengthen our oversight to make sure that this situation does not arise again.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. On August 17, Ornamental Mouldings in Waterloo closed up shop after 80 years. A lot of hard-working folks lost their jobs, some without any severance.

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The members of the Liberal benches might think this is a funny matter, Speaker, but people are losing their jobs all over Ontario—I'm talking right now about some in Waterloo.

In 2009, Kitchener Frame closed its doors, putting 1,200 people out of work—a closure that cost many retirees their benefits.

Does the Premier agree that we actually need to start creating new jobs in Kitchener–Waterloo with an NDP job creator tax credit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, we've been investing significantly in Kitchener–Waterloo when it comes to job creation. It's one of the most exciting successes in North America, when we look at the ICT sector in Waterloo and how it's exploding.

Communitech is a place where we've put in \$29 million. They've created 425 start-up companies. That's an investment that the NDP thinks is wrong because it's a partnership with the private sector.

The Premier talked about Desire2Learn earlier. I'll touch more on that in the supplementary. This company is growing by leaps and bounds because of the investments we've made in that company, the partnerships we've created, and the partnerships we've created with Communitech.

We're on the right track, Mr. Speaker. The NDP want to take us down the wrong road.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: As Gloria said in the town hall meeting that I had with the people of Kitchener–Waterloo last night, not everybody can work in the high-tech sector. They've lost thousands upon thousands upon thousands of manufacturing jobs in that community.

An NDP job creator tax credit rewards the companies that create jobs, that invest in their companies, that train their workers. It's going to create new jobs in Kitchener–Waterloo and across Ontario.

Will the Premier support the NDP job creator tax credit so that Ontario can create new, good jobs and get Ontarians, just like the ones at Ornamental Mouldings and Kitchener Frame, working again, which is all they want?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party knows that our Jobs and Prosperity Council is looking at that very issue.

I think what the NDP leader regrets is the fact that she hasn't supported the important investments that we've been making in the Kitchener–Waterloo area, the investments in Commutech that have created 425 new companies, countless jobs; 2,400 jobs created or retained in Kitchener–Waterloo because of those investments.

Desire2Learn just yesterday received an \$80-million venture capital funding announcement from New Enterprise Associates and OMERS. That's the largest-ever venture capital investment in a Canadian software company. They've added 210 employees already this year; they're on the road to increase their employment by another 150.

We're taking Kitchener–Waterloo and that economy in the right direction, despite the opposition from the NDP.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Grant Crack: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Recently the government announced the municipal infrastructure strategy. The McGuinty government is helping small, rural and northern municipalities strategically plan to maintain and build critical infrastructure required by families and businesses to build strong local communities.

Our government respects our municipal partners, and as you know, not all municipalities have the capacity to afford professional planning services, and this means that they might not have a strategic plan in place to build the best and maintain their infrastructure.

Can the minister inform this House about this important new program?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for the question.

Speaker, on August 16, we launched a \$60-million program as a down payment to support municipal asset management and necessary capital projects.

Building Together, our long-term infrastructure plan, includes a commitment to develop a municipal infrastructure investment strategy, and we launched the first phase of this strategy in partnership with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

The goals of the municipal infrastructure strategy include:

- moving away from disparate, one-off infrastructure programs and activities;

- driving better municipal asset management and performance reporting;

- prioritization of municipal projects based on best practices in asset management; and

- ensuring that provincial and federal support helps achieve these goals.

The first phase of the strategy will focus on asset management and will include the release of a guide for municipal asset management plans.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for that comprehensive answer.

As everyone is well aware, prior to October 6, I was a mayor in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, so I certainly understand the needs of local municipalities. Each municipality has varying infrastructure needs. Fortunately, I've been able to work with eight of my local mayors throughout the riding.

In the previous answer, the minister touched on the long-standing support that this government has given to public infrastructure. Can he further inform this House about the details of the strategy and the government's commitment to small, rural and northern municipalities?

1130

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Speaker, indeed we are committed to helping communities of all sizes address their critical infrastructure needs, and I'm happy to speak to the details of the municipal infrastructure strategy.

As part of this investment, we will provide up to \$9 million in funding this year to help Ontario's small, rural and northern municipalities prepare asset management plans. We will also provide at least \$51 million over the next three years to help address the most critical projects that are identified through asset management plans. This investment is in addition to our 2012-13 infrastructure budget of \$12.9 billion, which includes investments such as \$600 million in Ottawa's LRT program, \$300 million in Waterloo's LRT project and many other very significant infrastructure projects.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you've indicated that you want direct questions in question period about Ornge, and I have one. Why did a company that owned no aircraft—not a helicopter, not even a fixed-wing aircraft—win the contract to provide an air ambulance service for the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I don't know the answer to that question, but I do have a Minister of Health who is responsible for the Ministry of Health, as implicit in the title, and who has appeared before the committee on three separate occasions. So I very much

appreciate the direct question put forward by my honourable colleague. I don't know the answer to that. Should she wish to revisit that, I will refer her to the Minister of Health, who has responsibility for Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Premier, obviously it's very important to the voters of this province, because they entrusted you with the responsibility. You've been unable to answer questions, either in the public accounts committee or now here. So I would ask you, then, to look into this and find out what the answer is. Thank you.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the directness with which that question was tendered, which is very unlike the probably two dozen or so more that I've received from her colleagues.

What I need to say to my honourable colleagues as well is that it's time to move forward with Bill 50. We've made those changes that we can at this point in time. We asked for unanimous consent for second and third reading just last week. That was denied us. My honourable colleagues say they're interested in moving forward with this, but when we put them to the test in a very direct way, they deny us that. So I'll ask my honourable colleagues once again to stop acting in an obstructionist and irresponsible manner when it comes to Bill 50 and allow us to move forward with this, because it's in the greater public interest that we do so.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Speaker, this summer, provincial, federal and municipal leaders of communities all along the Pearson air-rail link co-signed a letter to the Premier. We asked him to immediately electrify the ARL, and we invited him to attend a town hall meeting in our community. The Minister of Transportation responded by letter, but he completely ignored our request and the community's concerns, simply claiming that a diesel ARL will "boost local quality of life."

My constituents do not believe you. Residents of Davenport are worried that the environment and their health and their tax dollars are at stake. When will the McGuinty government listen to Davenport residents?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The issue has been raised numerous times by the member and, really, he's trying to make a sow's ear out of a silk purse, because this is a good project and it's really a tremendous initiative in helping to build a city. Our commitment to upgrading the GO Georgetown South corridor and linking it to Pearson airport is smart city and transit building at its best. We have committed to electrifying the system. Every year, over five million people travel between Pearson and downtown Toronto by car. This expanded rail link will take 1.2 million polluting car trips off the road in its first year alone and create about 10,000 jobs in design and construction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Again, back to the Minister of Transportation: Our communities are sick of meeting with Metrolinx bureaucrats who don't have the power to change this plan. If this is such a good idea, why won't the minister listen to folks in our community, come and meet with our community and hear their concerns? Will the Premier or the Minister of Transportation meet with west Toronto residents so that you understand our concern and stop your plan to run dirty diesel trains through our community?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The fact is, the process to electrify the air-rail link has been under way for more than a year. An environmental assessment to electrify is currently ongoing. Let's not forget, the NDP are the ones who came up with a scheme to subsidize gasoline consumption, something that would increase gridlock and associated air pollution. Their position on the air-rail link is one of exaggeration and fear-mongering. The member should stop creating facts to confuse his constituents. Tier 4 trains are among the cleanest in the world and will reduce the current level of emissions. They reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 80% and airborne particulate emissions by 90%. This project is critically important for Toronto and for Ontario, and we're very excited to be bringing it into operation.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning Ontario's economy. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I'm still waiting. The member from Hamilton—Stoney Creek, please come to order. In a moment, I'll have a comment to make about today, but I will finish my business.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Leeds—Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the government House leader concerning the Premier's appearance before the public accounts committee. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now for my comment: There are a couple of observations I'd like to make and ask this to be given back to you. I've heard some of the heckling becoming personal and vindictive. I don't have a problem with heckling; I have a problem with members making personal comments about people's abilities.

I am going to be stricter from here on in, but I'm asking that the members themselves show their own discipline on the comments they make in this place.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 48. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1139 to 1144.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members take their seats, please.

The Sergeant-at-Arms had you in his bead.

Mr. Milloy has moved government notice of motion number 48. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hoskins, Eric
Jackson, Rod
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Leone, Rob
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McDonnell, Jim
McGuinty, Dalton
McKenra, Jane
McMeekin, Ted
McNaughton, Monte
McNeely, Phil
Meillure, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Milligan, Rob E.
Milloy, John

Moridi, Reza
Munro, Julia
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Orazielti, David
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Pettapiece, Randy
Piruzza, Teresa
Qadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles
Takhra, Harinder S.
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff
Zimmer, David

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
Campbell, Sarah
DiNovo, Cheri
Gélinas, France

Horwath, Andrea
Marchese, Rosario
Miller, Paul
Schein, Jonah

Singh, Jagmeet
Tabuns, Peter
Vanthof, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 82; the nays are 11.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning Ornge and the public accounts committee. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

There are no further deferred votes. This—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I feel that the Premier owes all women an apology because he implied that being pregnant should keep women from working, and that's totally unacceptable—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did not perceive that issue. If any member wishes to correct their own record, they may do so. I did not find anything unparliamentary.

This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: As I reflect back to almost 11 months ago, the first time I stood up in this House to speak, it was as the newly elected member for Huron-Bruce—I'm very proud to have that responsibility—and I was speaking out in objection to the closure of the Walkerton jail. And here we are today, with the Ontario correctional services in a complete disaster, way worse than it was just one year ago.

My colleagues the MPP for Elgin-Middlesex-London and the MPP for Sarnia-Lambton have had a meeting to discuss the overcrowding at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, where, the Minister of Correctional Services admitted that there was an issue with overcrowding.

Well, Minister, here is a reality check—what was predicted would happen to rural Ontario corrections with the closure of the Walkerton jail has happened: overcrowding, riots, poor standards and a lack of food for inmates have been reported, along with safety risks that jail guards are finding themselves in. Inmates are sleeping on the floor. Cells that are supposed to be geared towards two people are housing four to five people. All the while, two correctional facilities in my riding of Huron-Bruce have been closed down: the Walkerton jail and the Bluewater Youth Centre.

The Bluewater Youth Centre—more correctly, the centre—has not been decommissioned yet, and it would be of great use to the ministry for low-risk offenders, individuals awaiting a court date and those completing intermittent sentences.

I'm calling on the minister today, Speaker, to look at the resources the government has available and come up with real, viable, cost-effective strategies.

RANDOLPH ACADEMY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: As a supporter of the performing arts in Toronto, I would like to extend my con-

gratulations to the Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts.

Over the past 20 years, the Randolph Academy has been training Canada's most talented performers, creating triple threats who grace the stage in acting, singing and dance. If you have been to any of Toronto's major theatre events, you have likely watched alumni of this institution.

These performers are the product of two decades of effort by George Randolph, the founder of the Randolph Academy. George realized that Canada needed a training institution that could match the needs of the industry and train multidisciplinary performers for a life in the arts. As a result of their efforts, Randolph Academy graduates have been cast in some of the most celebrated musical theatre productions in Toronto, Stratford, Shaw, Broadway and London's West End.

Notable alumni include Tony Award winner Sergio Trujillo; Tara Young, artistic director of the Michael Jackson Immortal world tour with Cirque du Soleil; and Paul Nolan, star of the Broadway hit *Jesus Christ Superstar*. This year, George Randolph himself was recognized as a pioneer of dance by Dance Immersion and Dance Ontario.

I ask all members to join me in celebrating the Randolph Academy's 20th anniversary and the contribution its students and faculty have made to our cultural industries.

FLIGHT TRAINING CENTRE

Mr. David Oraziatti: I'm pleased to share the details of a significant infrastructure investment that our government has made in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. Last year, our government announced \$8.5 million in funding for the construction of a state-of-the-art flight training centre that will support Ministry of Natural Resources pilots in managing and responding to forest fires.

Construction of the 6,700-square-foot building began this spring and is now nearly complete. Once fully built, the building will house a cutting-edge flight training device, a new flight simulator, which will be installed for testing later this year.

The flight training simulator is a device that accurately mimics the sights and sounds and motions of a CL-415 heavy water-bombing plane. The flight simulator reduces greenhouse gas emissions and limits the wear and tear on the government's current forest firefighting fleet.

This project is the first of its kind in Ontario. Until now, Ontario's MNR pilots have had to carry out their winter training on flight simulators in Quebec and BC.

The construction of the new facility will further strengthen the province's firefighting program and provide an additional boost to our community. The project has created 14 construction jobs, and in the long term it will create additional employment opportunities and attract pilots and engineers from across Ontario and other jurisdictions seeking to enhance their training and aircraft maintenance skills.

Our government's investment in this unique project will enhance our ability to combat forest fires in the province.

EVENTS IN ONTARIO

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to congratulate the volunteers and organizers who host the many great fairs and festivals in my riding and the rest of Ontario.

Concluding with the Newington fair this past weekend, we have enjoyed an excellent venue of events with great entertainment that engaged the community, helped boost the local economy by adding important tourist attractions, and raised needed funds for many not-for-profit organizations.

Literally thousands of volunteers spent the past year preparing for these events, such as the Williamstown, Avonmore, Chesterville, South Mountain and Newington fairs, the Glengarry Highland Games, Cornwall Lift-Off and Ribfest, Winchester Dairyfest, Williamstown Homecoming Weekend, and the many Canada Day celebrations, just to name a few.

With fall upon us, there are many more of these entertaining events planned as these dedicated volunteers start planning for next year's events. Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank all the unsung heroes who truly care about our communities and who work so hard all year round at our fairs and festivals, in our social clubs and in the many other not-for-profit organizations that enrich our lives and truly make a difference in the community.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's with a heavy heart that I stand today and say that we live in a province that does very little to look after our animals, either domestic or exotic. We've all followed the tragic course of events at Marineland; they're still ongoing. And certainly we followed, back a while, in Newmarket, the possible death of 100 animals simply for a treatable disease, ringworm.

Well, today we read in the *Star* that the agency that has the responsibility to look after these animals doesn't feel it necessary to disclose even the salaries they make. In fact, the CEO makes more than our Premier. The board of directors make more than some of our cabinet members. And they spent \$4.6 million in so-called professional and consulting fees in 2010.

We in the opposition benches have long called for government oversight over OSPCA, and certainly I would suggest that now is the time to do just that. Not only do we need the Auditor General in there—we give them money and they do not perform well—but we also need oversight. We certainly need somebody to look after the animals. That's not happening. I hear about this all the time on my Facebook and Twitter. People are concerned. They're concerned everywhere about the fate of our animals.

It's about time that this government did something about it, and the place to start is by walking in the doors of OSPCA and finding out what is going on.

ASSOCIATION DES COMMUNAUTÉS FRANCOPHONES DE L'ONTARIO

M. Phil McNeely: L'Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario, ACFO, conseil régional d'Ottawa, tenait le 30 novembre dernier leur 42^e assemblée générale annuelle. Cette association a pour mission de promouvoir la francophonie et de valoriser les intérêts collectifs de la communauté francophone dans toute sa diversité. Nous savons que l'Ontario compte la plus importante communauté francophone hors Québec, avec près de 600 000 francophones.

Par respect pour ce rôle de défenseur de l'ensemble des communautés francophones, une résolution pour changer le nom a été proposée et adoptée par le conseil d'administration de l'ACFO. Je suis heureux d'annoncer que le processus légal est enfin terminé. L'ACFO d'Ottawa s'appelle maintenant officiellement l'Association des communautés francophones d'Ottawa. L'acronyme ACFO reste ainsi le même. Ce qui est important de comprendre dans ce geste est le souci de refléter une communauté francophone dont le visage évolue et change énormément.

Je veux donc féliciter le conseil d'administration de l'ACFO pour son initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup. Members' statements? The member for Nepean-Carleton.

1510

JOHN GEORGE LYNCH-STANTON

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my pleasure and my distinct honour and privilege to say thank you to the late John George Lynch-Staunton, also known to many people in this room as Senator Lynch-Staunton.

Senator Lynch-Staunton was first elected to politics in Montreal for three consecutive elections, in 1962, 1966 and 1970. He was so important to the city of Montreal and, of course, later to the Progressive Conservative Party, that he was appointed to the Senate. I first got to know Senator Lynch-Staunton when I was in my early 20s working in the Senate for John Buchanan, who was former Premier of Nova Scotia.

Senator Lynch-Staunton retired from politics but not before becoming the first leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. The party from Macdonald to Diefenbaker to Mulroney to MacKay, became the party of Stephen Harper in 2003.

I was pleased to know that Senator Lynch-Staunton, once he retired from politics, decided to get back in, and in 2009 ran for a seat in Stanstead, in Quebec, under the slogan, "Even an old broom sweeps clean." He was a very good friend to my husband and I, and I know I speak on behalf of many in the Conservative Party but also those people who worked on Parliament Hill in saying that we will miss him.

If I may, Speaker, close with a quote from Prime Minister Harper: "John ... played a crucial role in uniting

the conservative movement, serving as the first interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. John's wisdom, guidance and experience during that critical time helped keep our movement together and helped shape the strong party that is thriving across our great country today."

Thank you, Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Lynch-Staunton.

ONTARIO PRODUCE

Mr. Mike Colle: Today, I'm here to talk in praise of our locally grown fruits and vegetables. You know, in Ontario, we have some of the finest grown local products, especially at this time of year. We should stop and think about buying local potatoes, local peppers, local rapini, local zucchini, peaches and corn. We've got some of the finest foods, grown locally, in the world right here in Ontario. At this time of year, we shouldn't be buying foreign-made products or imported products. Buy locally made at your local greengrocer.

Mr. Speaker, I know I've got two great greengrocers that you should shop at in my riding, and they're better than the greengrocers in Brantford. On Marlee Avenue we have Zito's Marketplace. Then, we have Lady York Foods on Dufferin. We've got well-priced, fresh peppers and fresh tomatoes—the tomatoes from Leamington; the best tomatoes in the whole world come from Leamington. You can get them locally here.

Eat local. It's affordable. It's good for your health and you're keeping people working: the farmers, the truckers and the retailers. So please, young people and old people, eat local. Eat healthy. Eat your zucchini, eat your tomatoes, eat your carrots, eat your peppers—eat local.

ASSOCIATION OF HOSPITAL VOLUNTEERS-BOWMANVILLE

Mr. John O'Toole: This year, the Association of Ontario Hospital Volunteers in Bowmanville is celebrating its 100th anniversary. A lot has changed since 1912, when the former Ladies' Auxiliary was sewing hospital gowns and even planted a vegetable garden to help feed the patients and staff. Today, volunteers are equally dedicated and important. I would like to congratulate two young hospital volunteers, Julianne Baarbe and Scott Goodchild, who each received a \$1,200 educational bursary in recognition of this centennial.

Congratulations also to a very well-respected citizen, Anna Strike, a volunteer and leader for over 60 years in the hospital organization. She recently received a Diamond Jubilee Medal in recognition of her dedication as a volunteer.

I'd also like to recognize Diane Harness, the president of the Association of Hospital Volunteers, and Vice-President Marion Saunders. Thanks also to past presidents, Mary Lou Townsley and Norma Lewis.

With 200 adults and youth volunteers helping in almost every corner of the hospital, it's easy to see why

Lakeridge Health Bowmanville is known as the little hospital with a big heart.

I'd ask all members to extend a sincere thank you to all hospital volunteers and staff across Ontario.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, as we work towards a world record.

"Whereas Premier McGuinty has imposed fee schedule cuts to family physicians and proposed wage freezes unilaterally, he has therefore alienated the province's family doctors. These actions threaten the future of health care in Ontario and will compound the existing family physician shortage. As wait times for primary care will inevitably increase, so will the frustration of millions of Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the Premier reconsider his decision and return to the negotiating table with the Ontario Medical Association and the province's doctors, thereby working alongside patients and their primary care providers."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition on behalf of my constituents—and Jim will sign it, probably, as well.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north's economy; and

"Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

"Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately."

I fully agree, sign my signature and give it to page Roberto.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further petitions?

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government is forcing Ontario municipalities to build industrial wind and solar power generation facilities without any local say or local approval; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government transferred decision-making power from elected municipal councils "to unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats, who are accountable to no one; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has removed any kind of appeal process for municipalities or for people living in close proximity to these projects; and

"Whereas Tim Hudak, Jim Wilson and the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party have committed to restoring local decision-making powers and to building renewable energy projects only in places where they are welcomed, wanted and at prices Ontario families can afford;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty" Liberal "government restore local decision-making powers for renewable energy projects and immediately stop forcing new industrial wind and solar developments on municipalities that have not approved them and whose citizens do not want them in their community."

I have signed this petition and I certainly agree with them.

1520

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition coming to me from the good people of Scarborough, Barrie and Toronto, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario's cardiologists provide accessible, efficient, and cost-effective diagnostic testing services that save, and improve, the lives of thousands of people each year; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's unilateral, punitive changes to the OHIP fee schedule will result in the elimination of these crucial services, thereby leading to a reduction in patient access to care, the lengthening of waiting lists for services, the eradication of high-quality health professional jobs, and an increase in preventable deaths; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Cardiologists has presented an alternative, namely, the implementation of new, rigorous standards, which would ensure that cardiac diagnostic tests are done on the right patients, at the right time, by appropriately trained people, in accredited facilities, thereby reducing the number of inappropriate tests and leading to significant financial savings for the government; and

"Whereas this proposal has the endorsement of the highly respected Cardiac Care Network of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Direct the Ontario government to repeal the OHIP fee schedule regulation changes filed on May 7, 2012, and instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to work with the Ontario Association of Cardiologists to implement proposed cardiac diagnostic testing standards across the province."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Ethan to bring it to the Clerk.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

"Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

I support this petition and send it forward with Maggie.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

"Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario."

I affix my signature in full support.

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lack of enthusiasm when you said "Nickel Belt"; I don't know what's happening, but I'll keep on going anyway. Here, I have a petition from all over Ontario—from St. Thomas to Owen Sound to Peterborough—you name it; all over Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of no accountability, complacency, waste, patient neglect and substandard care in our health care system;

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and oversight of most health care agencies is done by that agency or sometimes through the ministry;

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces in Canada where our Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of health care services;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include investigation of our health care services, including health units, hospitals, retirement homes, long-term-care facilities and ambulance services."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Ethan to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased today to introduce a petition from Ashley Carr, who lives at 20 Leeson Street in downtown St. Catharines, Ontario.

A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection

Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

That's a long petition, but I will affix my signature to it and give it to Jacqueline because it's very important—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the latest policies from the McGuinty government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers."

I agree with this. I will pass this on to the page.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have maybe more than a couple of hundred petitions.

It reads: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiations in medical diagnostic and radiation therapy procedures; and

"Whereas the main piece of legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (HARPA), dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the act have kept pace with the explosion in imaging examinations, including image-guided procedures used in cardiology, radiation therapy, ultrasound, orthopaedics etc.;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of

radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I fully agree with these petitions, sign them and pass it on to page Roberto.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

1530

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

“That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Maggie.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonnell: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government's plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my doctor's ability to provide care for my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Reverse the” current “unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care.”

I will be signing this and passing it off to page Ethan.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to present a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas collecting and restoring old” vintage “vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

“Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

“Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

“Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on” very special occasions, “during four to five months of the year;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the” Minister of the Environment and the “Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore” carefully “old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks.”

I'm pleased to sign and support this and encourage the Minister of the Environment to follow my advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll let that one slip.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, yes. I was listening.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that a change has been made to the order of precedence for private members' public business, pursuant to standing order 98(c), such that Ms. Campbell assumes ballot item number 66 and Mr. Tabuns assumes ballot item number 73.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 30, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have work to do.

Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

On August 28, Ms. Broten moved second reading of Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1534 to 1539.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, take your seats, please.

Ms. Broten has moved second reading of Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia
Amott, Ted	Harris, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Bailey, Robert	Hoskins, Eric	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick
Bartolucci, Rick	Jaczeck, Helena	O'Toole, John
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Oraziotti, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Best, Margaret	Kwinter, Monte	Pettapiece, Randy
Bradley, James J.	Leal, Jeff	Piruzza, Teresa
Broten, Laurel C.	Leone, Rob	Qaadri, Shafiq
Cansfield, Donna H.	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Chan, Michael	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Chiarelli, Bob	MacLeod, Lisa	Sergio, Mario
Clark, Steve	Mangat, Amrit	Shurman, Peter
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Todd
Coteau, Michael	Mauro, Bill	Sousa, Charles
Crack, Grant	McDonnell, Jim	Takhar, Harinder S.
Damerla, Dipika	McGuinity, Dalton	Thompson, Lisa M.
Delaney, Bob	McKenna, Jane	Walker, Bill
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Wilson, Jim
Dickson, Joe	McNaughton, Monte	Wong, Soo
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Meilleur, Madeleine	Yakubiski, John
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Yurek, Jeff
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milligan, Rob E.	Zimmer, David
Gerretsen, John	Milloy, John	
Gravelle, Michael	Mondi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Singh, Jagmeet
Campbell, Sarah	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Paul	Vanthof, John
Gélinas, France	Schein, Jonah	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 79; the nays are 11.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, the bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE ACT (EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR LES AIDANTS NATURELS (MODIFICATION DES NORMES D'EMPLOI)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 31, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just by way of announcement, we were just finished the member from Leeds–Grenville's speech. We now are into the two-minute rotation, so I will entertain questions and comments on the member's statements.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can you please remind me what the member said?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll review the entire speech.

Interjection: I heard it was a great speech.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It was a great speech, Mr. Speaker. I was riveted to my seat at the time of the debate.

Let me just grab my glasses so I get this straight. Oh, yes, yes, yes. So, Mr. Speaker, this is one of these—welcome, Mr. Speaker number two. This is one of these bills where the government is essentially trying to do what sounds like the right thing—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, folks, it certainly is loud in here, and the deputy sheriff is in town, so we'll cut down the noise a little, please. You've got 19 sidebars going on. If you want to talk, you know where the outside rooms are. Thank you.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank you, because what I have to say is really important and I want everybody to listen.

As I was saying, this is another one of these bills where the government says it's going to do a good thing. Who am I to argue that the government is going to give citizens of the province an ability to get time off in order to care for a sick or dying member of the family?

We all get it. We know that there's no money attached to this. The person is not going to get EI or anything like that. But in itself, it might help a number of people to be able to care for somebody at home who needs some taking-care-of in those final days. So we're going to vote in favour of this legislation.

I just want to say up front this is again the government filibustering itself. The government has had this bill in the House now for how many days at second reading? The government talks about how it can't get anything done, and all it does is filibuster its own bill.

I look forward to seeing if the government is going to get up on the next round of rotation, or in fact if we're going to get to meaningful legislation, like trying to get Ontarians back to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was sorry to hear that the member for Timmins–James Bay did not give this bill a higher rating than he has, because I know the speaker whose remarks we're making reference to now did make

some favourable remarks about the bill and wasn't totally negative, as opposition members tend to be.

I was just looking at the deputy speaker and thinking, "What would the steelworkers think of that white collar I see on my friend the Speaker at this present time?"

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Very proud of him, I know.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): On a point of order, the member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As a steelworker, I want to say I'm very proud that you are Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thought a deputy speaker would have insisted upon a blue collar on this occasion. Anyway, I digress, and I shouldn't.

I am delighted to hear that the New Democratic Party is voting for this legislation. I hope that the Conservative Party is voting for it. We finally saw a sign of that, and I'm delighted, because right after the election, for the first several months in this House, the Conservative Party wouldn't vote for anything that the government had proposed. In fact, they announced before we brought forward the budget that they were not going to vote for the budget. Although there were some bumps along the way, at least the New Democratic Party ended up having some input into the budget, and ultimately not only the budget motion but the budget bills were passed. In a Parliament of this kind, a minority Parliament, that's what has to happen. In fact, even in a majority Parliament, I think it's very useful to listen to all points of view.

I want to thank the member for her contribution to this debate. I know it's an important debate and that we want to thoroughly canvass all aspects of this particular piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was very good. You got the name right off.

I want to give comment to the member from Leeds-Grenville, who spoke about the Family Caregiver Leave Act. Second reading—I think we've had hours and hours of debate. It has been brought up several times, and when I spoke to it a long time ago, that, really, this does nothing else—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: He is actually here, in the sidebar.

It really does nothing. There's no money attached to it.

Again, the Liberals are very, very good at filibustering and bringing in pieces of legislation with nice titles that actually don't do anything. So why don't we stop wasting time and get some really good pieces of legislation in—I'm trying to give the Liberals advice here—that actually do tackle the real problems that are out there in health care?

You brought us back in early. That's all fine. You want to try to get some credibility in the by-elections—good luck on that filibuster that you're doing here—and

change the channel for a while—your scandals of Ornge, eHealth, the dollars you've actually wasted in health care, power plants. I mean, the list does go on, and I only have a two-minute hit, so what can I say?

You're not addressing or modernizing, reforming, health care the way it needs to be today. You do things like the Family Caregiver Leave Act etc. etc. You bring in bills that actually don't help people stay in their own homes. They actually don't give you more home care—you say you are, but if you talk to people on the ground, you don't. They're taking care away. You've got LHINs and CCACs, highly administrative bodies, that aren't getting the care—which are more people who need care in their homes.

Bring in some really fruitful piece of legislation that actually helps people in health care, and then we'll talk. But this just does nothing, as most Liberal governments do.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin with saying that the initiative makes sense. Individuals who are going to work and who want to take some time off to take care of their loved ones should be entitled to do so without fearing losing their job. They should have a measure of protection. I think that makes sense. I think it's fair to give credit where credit is due. That idea makes sense. As my colleague indicated, we'll support the bill.

But I want to take this opportunity to talk about some deeper measures that we could look at. When we look at health care, we should look at some effective means of delivering that care. One of the greatest opportunities I had was to view and to work in a community health care centre. Community health centres are an amazing vehicle to provide care in a community setting, in a cost-effective manner, in a way that really increases not only the addressing of an acute illness but also long term in terms of health prevention. It's an excellent model, and I think that's something we need to move towards if we really want to be serious about keeping people in their homes, keeping people healthy. We need to look at those models that are working, that would save us money and that would actually provide a better product. So I really want this House to really seriously consider expanding community health centres as well as home care.

Home care used to be a very common service provided. We had doctors and nurses who would attend to people in their homes. That's a much more effective way of providing care than having individuals go to emergency rooms and clog up emergency room systems where there is an illness that doesn't require all the equipment and all the infrastructure of a hospital, but you would be better served to be at home. I think we really need to look at these alternative methods of delivering health care to really address this issue of individuals who do get sick and how we can care for them in the best way possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Leeds—Grenville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member for Timmins—James Bay, as he goes by, the Minister of the Environment, the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and also the member for Bramalea—Gore—Malton for your very kind and insightful responses to my address so many, many days ago.

As we're saying today, we're talking about Bill 30. I know I expressed in my speech a number of concerns about yet another act that would provide a leave of absence. We certainly, from this side of the House, don't want to give the impression that we don't believe very strongly in the work that our front-line workers do and our families do that provides compassionate care.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize my federal counterpart, Gord Brown, the federal member for Leeds—Grenville. I want to congratulate him. On August 8, Prime Minister Harper announced that Mr. Brown's private member's bill, that he has been working on since 2004, to give 35 weeks of compassionate care leave for families with critically ill children—it was passed. It was part of their campaign platform, and I want to congratulate Mr. Brown on his work, fighting for compassionate care, and I want to thank the Harper government for moving forward.

I also want to especially thank Sharon Ruth from Oxford Station, who wrote a book called *The Guinea Kid*. It talked about her struggles and having to take work off and take leave to care for one of her children who was critically ill. I know that Sharon's story prompted Gord Brown to move forward with his private member's bill.

I think I speak for everyone in my riding of Leeds—Grenville to thank Sharon, to thank Gord and to thank Prime Minister Harper on moving forward on that very important bill, which I think was very much needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act.

I have many concerns about—I don't understand, quite frankly, the motivation of the government. Again, this bill was introduced early in the session. Here we are almost a year later. They talk about priorities, and they haven't moved ahead with the bill. They haven't moved ahead with the bill.

The problem with the bill, Mr. Speaker, is that it has no teeth whatsoever. It is one of these feel-good, nice titles—if I had a copy of the bill right here, I could read the title, exactly what it is, but it's another one of these Liberal feel-good pieces of legislation that is designed to appeal to a certain constituency.

Perhaps I could ask the page to bring me a copy of the bill. Oh, it's coming right there. Thank you very much.

It is An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave. But there's

nothing in the bill; not a thing. There's not a nickel attached to it. This is guaranteeing people that they will have eight weeks of unpaid leave—unpaid leave.

I was in business. I employed people, and I'm going to tell you something. If they were a good employee and they needed eight weeks to care for a relative, a mother, a father, immediate family or otherwise, there was not going to be a problem. A good employee: You're going to make sure they're looked after, because you want them back.

All of this is doing what the real world does anyway, but the sad part about it is, they're portraying this as if there's some kind of magical formula here, but they're not attaching a nickel to it. December 8—the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—was the date that this bill received first reading. I guess they expected another miracle. The immaculate conception, of course, was a miracle, and I guess they're expecting another miracle, because somehow they're figuring they're going to pressure the federal government to now come up with some money. Again, a piece of legislation that is designed for no other reason than to make the Liberals look good.

I say to my colleague from Timmins—James Bay, who had a very good speech yesterday talking about how the Liberals are always acting in self-interest: This is another one of those cases. All you have to do is look at what they've brought forward in the House, what they haven't brought forward in the House, and when they brought the House back. The House was brought back on August 27 under the guise of a very serious legislative need to be here to pass an act that would freeze the wages of teachers for two years and—

Hon. John Gerretsen: And you voted in favour of that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We voted in favour just now on a second reading. But the Premier told the world, or any of those who would listen, that that piece of legislation had to be passed by September 1 in order to prevent salary increases of up to 5.5% from taking effect with respect to teachers in our system. As we know now, on September 5, that clearly was false. There was no need to be here to pass a bill before September 1; no need whatsoever. There was no need whatsoever to be here. Clearly, what we were being told in August was not in keeping with the facts. We did not have to be here. That was the urgent message he was telling people out there.

I say that to the Premier across the way here. He told the people across Ontario, "I'm Dalton McGuinty and I mean business now. For nine years, I've kind of been lost in la-la land, but I really mean business now. I'm going to put a steady hand on the wheel here now. We're going to take control of Ontario's fiscal situation, and we're going to start with a bill to freeze the wages of teachers."

Interestingly enough, our party—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Peterborough on a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I always keep my standing orders readily available here, and it's section 23(b). I think we may be straying a little bit from the Family Caregiver Leave Act, but I did want to depend upon you to provide guidance in this particular matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member for Peterborough. I think that's the fourth time he has read that to me today. It seems to be a good day for people walking the thin line; let's put it that way.

I would remind the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to please try to keep to the bill. Even if it's close, it would be acceptable. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaking of a thin line, it's a pretty thin bill, Speaker. As I said, eight weeks in the calendar year; no money attached to it.

The motivation in this House and the motivation of this Premier seems to be centred on September 6: the Kitchener–Waterloo and Vaughan by-elections. I know that my colleague from Timmins–James Bay spoke extensively about that yesterday while speaking on another bill. So apparently that is fair game, because I think it's in keeping with the plan of the government and why we are here. We were told to get ourselves down to Queen's Park to pass this urgent legislation. Do you realize that there have been over 12 hours of debate on this bill already? We've got no problem. Call this thing for a vote.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to remind the members—especially one—that cross-border talks are not allowed. This is why I'm sitting here. You might want to go through me. And if you have a problem with what he's saying, there's always what the member from Peterborough did: a point of order. Otherwise, if you want to yell at each other, you might want to go outside, but he can't because he's speaking. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for clarifying that too, Mr. Speaker, because, yes, I'm here. I was going to be here for an extra two minutes and 30 seconds; it's down to almost one minute and 30 seconds because of the interjections from the Attorney General. I remind him if he wants to have cross-border speaking, he's going to have to come up with a Nexus card or something, because other than that, we just have to stick to the—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It seems to be a day for points of order. The member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you so much. I'm glad we had the document at the Speaker's chair corrected.

Just further to my colleague, I feel that we're going off-script again. We're wasting valuable time, and that is not in keeping, may I suggest, Speaker, with standing order 23(b). The member is not talking about the bill at hand. I look forward to your further guidance on this. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will monitor the situation closely, member, and if I feel that the member from Renfrew is wandering, I will certainly inform him. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. If I'm going to do any wandering, it's going to be a short trip now. I'm down to less than half a minute because of all the interjections from the members on the other side of the House. If they would just pay attention and listen, we might get this thing settled.

Anyway, here we have a bill, the Family Caregiver Leave Act, amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000, that is, quite frankly, not worth the paper it's written on. It doesn't put money in the pot to help people; it simply says that your employer has to give you eight weeks off. Well, if you're a good employee, your employer will give you eight weeks off—guaranteed. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: While I was listening to my colleague's comments, I wanted to raise a particular issue that came to my mind. My colleague is absolutely right: There is no money attached to this. This is simply allowing an employee to take some time off. What I'm concerned about is: How can we ensure that this is actually followed through? How can we ensure that if an employee does take that time off, the employer doesn't take certain action, doesn't refuse to allow that person to come back to work? When we already have a labour code that's not enforced, when we already have employee standards which aren't enforced, how can we ensure that this bill will be enforced?

I think we have to look a little bit closer, that if we want to protect workers, or if we want to protect someone who wants to take care of their loved ones, there needs to be an accountability mechanism; there needs to be a way to make sure that employers do follow through with legislation like this. We've already seen, time and time again, that their standards at workplaces aren't up to par, and the regulations aren't being enforced. So how then would this type of legislation be enforced? I think we really need to look at, in the mechanism of the legislation, a way to either put some resources into ensuring that employers follow this code, along with the other legislations that are in existence, or take some other means to make it more powerful or more meaningful, because simply passing another bill without the proper resources or infrastructure in place, i.e., those who would enforce legislation, would be a meaningless gesture. So I think we have to look at it one step further to make sure that this is actually implemented in a meaningful way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm always intrigued by the speeches delivered by the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He has the ability to deliver a speech on a bill that sometimes he hasn't even read. I'm not saying in this case he has or hasn't, but that's a great

talent. I don't criticize him for that; it's an interesting talent. I'm sure he scanned it in his ability to speak here today.

Actually it's a very good bill, and the contradiction for the members of the Conservative Party is the following, and that is that they keep demanding that the government not impose on business any new requirements and they also demand that the government not spend more money. Yet this bill does not, in fact, spend more taxpayers' dollars. Yes, it is an obligation that is placed on business. The suggestion is that any business would be prepared to grant this. I think any good business—and I trust my good friend, the member from Barry's Bay, would be the kind of employer who in fact would do that; knowing him as I do, I'm confident he'd be the kind of employer who would do that. Not all employers will.

So I think many people will see this, again in the context of the times in which we find ourselves, as being an important step in terms of allowing people the opportunity to look after someone in these circumstances.

I guess if there were unlimited money—and there isn't unlimited money anywhere in the world these days—there might be a stipend attached. There are some who have suggested that through the unemployment insurance system, that may be able to work into that particular system. We shall see about that.

But I think this is a positive bill. I think it has received the kind of attention and debate that it should in this House, and whether it comes to a vote this afternoon or not will be up to others. But I do appreciate the contribution my friend has made to this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I've listened to the members from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, from Bramalea-Gore-Malton and the Minister of the Environment, and I tend to agree with our colleague here from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that there are actually no resources put to this. It reminds me a lot of similar bills we've seen introduced here. While it sounds good on a campaign leaflet, it does very little for workers.

I also agree with my brother here from Bramalea-Gore-Malton that without any enforcement officers, this really does not mean much for workers, which is problematic. In a province where we have 600,000 people who need jobs, we also have employers who know that all employment is precarious and that somebody can come in and take that job at any moment.

What we really need to do here is to make sure that we have proper enforcement, that when people are sick, that they're compensated appropriately and supported to take time off and take care of their family members, but also, we spend a tonne on hospital bills in this province and if we took some of those resources and put it into home care, in supporting families when their family members are sick, we would be saving money and we would make sure that people could stay at work and have the supports they need to be here.

I will support this because, in principle, we need to make sure that we have this at least stated as possible, for people to take leave of absence when a family member is sick. Of course that makes sense, but we do need enforcement measurements in the workplace. We look around here, and in every file that we see here there is not the enforcement; there is not the resource behind any bill that's introduced here.

1610

I agree with members here who have spoken about this as being very partisan politics at play. We see a government that's more interested in winning a seat tomorrow in Kitchener-Waterloo than they are in making sure that we have good public policy here, and I hope that after tomorrow we can move forward with an order of business that puts people first in this province and doesn't just put good spin on bills. So I'll be supporting this, but in the future I hope that we have a little bit more meat on our bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I appreciate the time to debate here on Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act. Again, I alluded to earlier, when I was referring to and talking about putting students first, how this government loves to use fluffy titles, feel-good titles in their bills, but as to the actual meat of the bill itself, there's no substance; there are no nutrients there.

So here we have a situation and in theory it sounds wonderful. Obviously, my esteemed colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke alluded to the fact that compassion has to come in to order as well, and as an employer, if an employee has a family member who is terminally ill and needs some time away, whether it's eight weeks, 10 weeks, or several more months, we have to show that kind of compassion to allow that individual the time that is required to look after their loved one until such time as there's no need to do so. The fact is, again, in theory, it's good.

There are families out there that are struggling to make ends meet, though, families who can't afford, even if they are allowed under this bill, Bill 30, to take up to eight weeks off without pay—most of the families in Ontario are struggling now to make ends meet. They can't afford to take eight weeks off without pay, with the skyrocketing prices of hydro, their home heating bills, their property taxes. It's unaffordable, Mr. Speaker. Really, again, it's just a fluffy, feel-good piece of legislation that has no sustenance, no nutrients.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, the Minister of the Environment, the member from Davenport and also my colleague from Northumberland-Quinte West.

No one argues against the principle of having a compassionate view of people who are going through a

difficult time where someone in their family may be terminally ill or requiring a long period of convalescence or whatever. An interesting part of this bill—and I don't know why the government did it that way—is that you must take these in blocks of a minimum of entire weeks. So if you had a person who was going for cancer treatments and only had to go maybe once in a while—I remember when my brother-in-law was dying of cancer, he went for treatments every day, but the same person might not necessarily be taking him every day. So if you had two or three relatives that could share that, they wouldn't be able to do that under this bill, because you've got to take the time off in blocks of entire weeks. There's just another weakness pointed out in the bill, because in their haste to get it out—I guess their timing is pretty bad, because it says the bill comes into effect on July 1, 2012. That's past. We're here, still talking about the bill. Is this government so incompetent that they can't even get their own legislation through in the time frame that they prescribe in the statute itself? It says it comes into effect July 1, 2012. Here we are in September; we haven't gotten through the bill.

That's because they're so busy playing smallitics instead of getting on with the business of the House. Let's get this thing to committee. They want to pass it. We think it's an empty bill. It's just politics as usual, trying to wedge the federal government. That's what they're trying to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, I almost didn't get up, Mr. Speaker, because I agree with the previous speaker that we've said everything there is to say about this page-long bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me. I've been notified that you spoke to this bill on March 8, so you're not allowed to speak to it.

Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I was interested in the comments made about my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, that he hadn't even read the bill, that he had just scanned it. If you know this member, he's just like a computer; he just has to scan something, and his understanding of legislation—

Interjection: It's remarkable.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It certainly is remarkable.

I have a brief here that was given to the PC caucus. I'd like to read it over so that we all have an understanding of what's in this bill. The minister's staff provided this briefing on the legislation. The purpose is as follows:

To introduce a proposed family caregiver leave for up to eight unpaid weeks per year. To qualify for the leave, the employee must be caring for an individual whom a physician has deemed to have a critical injury or illness and who cannot care for themselves. The leave will mirror the family medical leave significantly, except it will not include the provision of significant risk of death within a 26-week period.

There are currently only two leaves available to workers in Ontario that are protected under the Employment Standards Act. Family medical leave is unpaid, job-protected leave of up to eight weeks in a 26-week period, and to be eligible, a qualified health practitioner must issue a certificate stating that the individual to be cared for has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks. Under the federal Employment Insurance Act, six weeks of employment insurance benefits may be paid to EI-eligible employees under this leave.

Personal emergency leave: Some employees have the right to take up to 10 days of unpaid job-protected leave each calendar year due to illness, injury and certain other emergencies and urgent matters. This leave is only eligible for individuals who work for a company that regularly employs more than 50 employees.

Now, the concern we have is that the Ministry of Labour staff could not cite any demand for this proposed leave, nor could they cite any instances where employees had asked for leave to care for a family member and were terminated as a result. And at that time—this was given to us on December 8; again, the bill has taken too many months to be presented to the House—the Ministry of Labour also had not yet briefed any stakeholder groups whom this could significantly affect.

Speaker, before I came to this House, I worked with my wife in our decorating business. We employ three to four employees at any one time. There were times when our staff had to take time off in order to care for their parents. We let them go. We just let them do it, and they understood that they wouldn't be paid for that day.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You're an enlightened employer.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you very much.

Interjection: He's a very compassionate man.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. I listen to my wife quite a bit, so it helps me out.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That makes for a compassionate man.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes, exactly.

Anyway, this is something we've done ever since we've had the business going, for the past 20 years. But you can understand that in order for our business to succeed, we book ahead quite a bit of the time, because we were in the decorating business, or my wife's in the decorating business now. We have a number of houses that we have to paint every year and other things we have to do, and for an employee to say to us, "I'm going to take eight weeks off," is difficult for our small company to comprehend. You can imagine the work involved in painting a house, with doing the trim, the ceilings, walls and whatever else.

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The way this legislation is written for the employees, if they even take half a day off to take their parents or someone to the doctor, they have to take the whole week off or they're charged for a week. I don't think that's fair for the employees.

I can understand the reasoning for this legislation, except that it seems to me that it wasn't very well prepared; it wasn't very well put together. My brother-in-law currently is suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease. Fortunately, my sister has been able to stay home with him, but he does have personal support workers too, helping them out. However, if my sister was employed by somebody else, eight weeks just wasn't going to cut it. It just wouldn't work for her. He's at the stage right now where he's in a wheelchair and needs a lot of care.

It was interesting, some of the points that came out in this bill by my colleagues, in that this government currently is hoping that the federal government would pick up the tab on this with employment insurance. To me, this is being irresponsible. This government is supposed to run this province, not ask the federal government to run it for us.

This bill was tabled on December 8 of last year. Again, it seems to me that it wasn't brought forward until this government decided that they would like to shift the emphasis off some of their other health care issues, such as Ornge—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Ornge, eHealth.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: —eHealth and whatever else, to try to get the spotlight off of that.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the members from the NDP caucus if they'd like to go outside. It's a little loud. I'm having trouble hearing the speaker. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you for that correction.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My colleague Mr. Yurek had occasion to speak to this bill before, and he told us of a pharmacist leaving his employ to look after their parents. They worked 18 hours a day, trying to keep up with their business in their pharmacy. That's a hard thing to do, especially when you can't just pick up a pharmacist anywhere you want to, in order to help you out with the business. They had to fill in the hours for this pharmacist who was unable to work for them.

I find it interesting, and I want to get back to the bill, in that there is no money in the bill. Of course, we don't want to spend any more money in this province. We haven't got the money to spend.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: We're broke.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: We're broke, and we have to be careful of what we do with any of the monies we have available to us. But it's interesting that this bill depends on the federal government to make it work.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: That's because we're a have-not province.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: We're a have-not province, and this is just one way of trying to get money from somebody else in order to help pay for your bills.

Also, what a serious illness is, or what a serious health condition is, is not defined in this bill. It's not clearly defined, and there's no clear definition of who is eligible

to take this caregiver leave. So it's interesting to me. Our employees could go to a doctor, and one doctor has a different opinion than the other. These conditions aren't as defined as they should be.

I don't understand the consulting process that should have been done on this bill with businesses—apparently, there was none, because as we've seen, as I've just stated, nobody had asked for this type of legislation in the first place. So it's interesting to me that this government would try to go ahead with a bill that actually nobody wanted; nobody asked for.

It seems to me that we have other problems in this province that need to be fixed before we continue on with a bill that has no substance to it such as this bill that we have before us today. We have issues such as a health care industry that is not doing well right now funding-wise and needs to have a lot of work. We should be pointing our efforts in that direction and not a bill such as this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I sort of agree with what the previous speaker had to say. If you talk to caregivers—and God knows Ontario has some really good caregivers—a lot of them are just ragged trying to keep a job and look after a loved one with home care that doesn't show up half the time or doesn't send the right workers or doesn't show up at all. So when they saw this bill, they were excited. Finally their government was going to help them a little bit. But then, as they took the time to read the bill, one after the other the associations came to see me.

The Parkinson Society read this. A lot of people with Parkinson's need a caregiver at home. They said, "How come we have to take a week at a time?" If you go for cataract surgery, you have to put those little drops in four times a day. With Parkinson's, forget this. It's not happening. You need somebody to help you. It doesn't have to be a nurse; anybody can be taught. But the bill does not allow flexibility. You have to take a week at a time. It would be nice to be allowed to maybe start work a little bit later because you have to look after somebody, or maybe be allowed to have an hour for lunch rather than half an hour so that you can zip home and put the drops in and zip right back. None of that is in the bill. Flexibility wouldn't cost us anything. It would still—but no.

The bill is so tiny, so small, Mr. Speaker, that of all the agencies, of all the chronic disease societies that have come to see me, the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, not one of them could give me one example of one person who will be helped with that bill—not one.

It has been nine months that this bill is out there for everybody to read. I have had dozens and dozens of societies come through my office, and not one will be helped with the bill the way it is. Let's send it to committee. It needs to be amended.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to address what the member from Perth–Wellington said.

This bill is intended for all employees—whether full-time, part-time, permanent or contract—covered under provincial employment standards legislation. They would all be eligible regardless of how long they've been employed.

You mentioned 50 employees. That's for the personal emergency leave. It is a doctor who defines a serious illness, so that's who we defer those decisions to.

I would hope that the member would consider all of this when deciding whether to vote for this bill or not.

I also appreciate what the member from Nickel Belt had to bring forward. She speaks about the flexibility, and that can be achieved, certainly, through the committee process. We are open to making the bill more flexible.

I just wanted to also name at least a few of the organizations of all of those that have expressed support for the bill: the MS society, the Parkinson Society, the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, the Canadian Cancer Society, the caregiver coalition.

The bill can certainly be improved through everyone's input. We are open to that.

At the same time, the reason why this was brought forward is because we were asked by many of our constituents to bring this forward. We felt so strongly about this that we made it part of our platform.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand up and speak to the comments that my colleague from Perth-Wellington made. As he can well appreciate, we come from a very, very proud community of agricultural industries and farmers and small towns, and common sense has to prevail in everything we do.

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Prior to October 6, 2011, I was general manager of an agricultural processing company. When the best-before date came and went, we pulled that product off the shelf. Mr. Speaker, I think today is a perfect example of an attempt to have window dressing on an issue that has just failed. Its lifetime, its shelf life, if you will, has come and gone, and so I don't know why we're spending time on this when we should be addressing important issues—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Why are you speaking, then?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Because I'm making a strong statement here that we should be addressing important issues like Bill 50.

We have gone on and on in terms of regulations. Our folks are tired of being burdened with red tape and unnecessary regulation. The member from Perth-Wellington pointed out that, in many cases, small business, which is the engine of this economy and this wonderful province of Ontario—small businesses have a lot of common sense. Where needed, as the member pointed out, employers do the right thing and give people time off when needed. When he shared his personal example, it made me think of a company from Goderich, Ontario. They're expanded throughout the region, but Edward Fuels does the very same thing. It really was heartfelt

when I heard of a story of a gentleman suffering from cancer, and the owner did the right thing and said, "Take all the time you need." This bill is not necessary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I've listened to the members from Perth-Wellington, Nickel Belt, York South-Weston and Huron-Bruce speak to this bill.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You must be depressed.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Honestly, I'm not that impressed. Thank you, Minister of the Environment. We've heard an issue that has been—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I think he said "depressed."

Mr. Jonah Schein: Oh, "depressed." I'm not impressed. I am a little depressed about the level of debate in here.

Frankly, Speaker, we've identified an issue within this Legislature, and the issue is that we have an aging population. We have family members who are in need of care, and we need a strategy to deal with this. What we have is—and nobody on this side of the House is fooled about this—a government bill that does nothing to address this issue, for the most part. It's a very, very small bill. Instead of addressing the things that would actually relieve families and support sick family members, we just put something that's good for a piece of campaign literature. We should be supporting our folks.

I have a community member who comes to me who has been caring for an ill family member for years now. He himself is living in poverty, and his mother is living in poverty at this point.

Instead of investing in affordable housing, instead of investing in home care, instead of investing in child care, instead of creating good jobs, all these things are being cut back. We're going after good jobs. We're going after sick days. We're making it harder for families. Families don't have child care.

These are not inspiring times in this Legislature, I'm afraid, Mr. Speaker. We don't have a government that's actually willing to stand up and support families in this province. We're debating a bill instead of coming up with a real job strategy in this province that would put people back to work and create jobs that would actually pay the bills and give people an ounce of security and the ability to take care of a family member when they are ill, and I hope that this turns around soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Perth-Wellington has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the members from Nickel Belt, York South-Weston, Huron-Bruce and Davenport.

There is a section I should repeat here. It says that a family medical leave is unpaid job-protected leave up to eight weeks in a 26-week period. I would suggest that if someone is sick for eight weeks, that is probably very serious, and it would be important that that person seek medical help through some other system so that person could get back to work and make a living. I think this bill—should take a look at that section, and maybe there

wouldn't be any reason to have this bill before the House right now.

It's interesting that back on December 8, as I said before, MOL staff could not cite any demand for this proposed leave, nor could they cite any instances where employees had asked for leave to care for a family member and were terminated as a result. So why is this legislation before the House? It wasn't asked for. It wasn't needed. So why are we debating a bill such as this today? It was brought forward to take our attention off some other events that are going on in this province. It was also brought forward to take attention off of some other very serious problems going on in the health care system.

I believe that if this government was serious about getting this province back in order financially, we'd be looking after a few other things before we look at a bill like this. We need jobs in this province. We need our health issues straightened up, and in my opinion those aren't being done. This bill was just brought forward in order to mask some of the problems that this current government has.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have some time in which to discuss Bill 30, the caregiver act. The first thing I'm reminded—

Interjection.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Oh, the clock isn't going?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sorry, we were singing and obstructing the debate.

Mrs. Julia Munro: No, the clock wasn't going.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, the clock's not going.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes. Okay. No? Are we ready?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Continue.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Okay. Thank you very much, to the table, to get us all organized here.

I'm pleased to spend a few minutes to talk about Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act. But I want to remind viewers and members that when you look at this bill, it reminds me of a term that I've used before in the Legislature to describe government bills, and that is "gesture politics."

Let me explain. "Gesture politics" is a term that's used to demonstrate the fact that that's what it is, a gesture like any other gesture. Does it have any substance? No. It is simply a gesture, and in this case, we're looking at yet another example of Liberal gesture politics. It looks good on the surface. It allows, according to its title and so forth, caregiver leave, and that means that someone is able to go to his or her employer and say that there is a circumstance with an immediate family member that requires them to take time from their job, and that if certain criteria are met, then this person has up to eight weeks of unpaid leave. It sounds good, until you look at the unpaid part, until you look at the part that only allows you to have a full week at a time off, and then you begin to see some of the shortcomings. One of the other shortcomings might be just checking on the demand. I can say

that in my riding I have not had phone calls to introduce something along that line.

I also look at some of the people in other circumstances and their response to this. One of the things is going back to the Drummond report. I know that the current government, after spending over a year and the commensurate cost of having an expert, Mr. Don Drummond, report—he seems to have slipped off the Liberal radar screen and they don't talk about him anymore. But in his report he did talk about and demonstrate that the size, growth and scope of government had reached a perilous point.

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I happen to agree with that, and I happen to agree with a number of things that Mr. Drummond pointed out in his very thorough report. But when I look at this bill, it somehow doesn't measure up to any of the characteristics that Mr. Drummond thought were urgent matters for our consideration. I suppose you could argue that it doesn't cost the government any money; I note that. That's also a part of gesture politics: that you can look good at a distance. That's the purpose of life on that side of the House: to look good at a distance. It's great to get the PR out there about how much they care about people in their homes and how important it is to provide caregivers. I agree with the importance of caregivers, but I also note that it doesn't come with any money. I also note who does it fall on the backs of? Primarily, the people who create the jobs in this province, and that would be small business.

How are you going to be able to effect a departure of someone out of a fairly small pool of people for eight weeks? How is someone going to be able to survive without a paycheck for eight weeks? These are just some of the practical parts of this bill that are omitted.

When you look at the details of this bill, it reminds me a bit of the healthy homes renovation tax credit. In that bill, that's gesture politics too, because while it sounds great that they're going to provide an opportunity for you to make adjustments in your home that would allow you to stay there longer—and that's certainly the wish of most people—buying a grab bar in the hardware store and installing it in your shower is not likely to be the final crux of whether you can stay there or not. The other thing is that—I haven't checked into the cost of them, but let's say it's \$50; 15% of that is not going to make a decision about whether you buy it or not. Once again, the gesture is there that we're helping you stay in your home longer. Of course, it helps if you have \$10,000. The same thing with this: You're going to have an eight-week caregiver leave. Of course, that assumes you can afford to go without a paycheck for eight weeks.

Going back to Mr. Drummond's concerns, which I share, on this side of the House we've been seized with the concerns of people from all across this province. We've understood that the third-largest spending component of this government is actually the interest and the carrying charges on the debt. After hospitals and education comes paying for the debt. So on this side of the

House we've been looking for answers that would in fact engage all Ontarians into a conversation and an understanding of the perilous nature of our economy. Our leader, Tim Hudak, has been very clear that a plan to freeze public sector wages would be fair because it would include everyone. Everyone would understand that it's the same amount and it's for the same length of time. There are no side deals made to special friends of the government.

Along with that pay freeze, we're looking at fixing some of the cost of government. We look at the fact that you have spending that is out of control in certain areas and the kinds of attention that those areas deserve. We also know that we have to reduce the cost of government, that we have to look for methods by which we actually spend less, because every family in this province knows that you can't continue to spend more than you have, year after year after year.

The message here is that we're debating a bill that costs the government nothing. It only serves to make them look as if they're very concerned about the issue.

I think about the businesses in my riding, and the large ones will come to me and say, "Julia, do you know how much it costs to be closed for Family Day? Do you know that our competition has a much higher rate of productivity, partly through the difference in the days that are statutory holidays and time off?" I look at these eight weeks and I think about those businesses that compete internationally today. With the higher cost of the Canadian dollar, they're always looking for efficiencies. They run into a government that hands everyone a day off, and it costs hundreds and thousands of dollars.

So when you look at this piece of legislation, I think you have to look at it in the context of what are the real problems and forget the gesture politics. We don't need government management of people's time. We need government leadership on our debt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have to say I really respect what the member had to say, because she's saying it on the basis of what she believes, but I really disagree.

The reality is that when you stop and think about it, I would far rather, as a legislator, that a parent or a family member is better able to take care of a loved one than having to pay somebody to go out and do it in the public sector. If that person who is sick doesn't have somebody watching for them who is unpaid, who happens to be a family member, who's going to take care of them? It has to be somebody out of the CCAC, it's got to be somebody at a hospital or it's got to be somebody in a long-term-care facility.

That argument that I heard at the end of your speech—I respect what you're saying, because I understand your convictions are, as a Conservative, that you believe that giving people time off and all that kind of stuff is a bad thing. I get that. But I've got to say, that is like—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: That's not what she said.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Maybe I misunderstood, and please clarify if I got it wrong. But I understood what you were saying was what I just said.

You were also arguing that giving people time off makes our economy less competitive, and I would say completely the opposite. Come on. The reality is that when people have a fair amount of time off—and we're not talking about time off like 12 months a year—it allows people to go away, get refreshed and come back and be more productive.

Take a look at most of the powerful economies of the world, such as Germany and others. They give far more time off in those jurisdictions than we do here in Canada.

I would further argue that Canada is very productive. I look at where I come from, in the resource sector, both mining and forestry. Per person, we produce more than almost every other jurisdiction. Why? Because we have gotten very good at what we do, by the use of technology and training our workers to do a good job.

So I would just argue—and greatest of respect, because I respect Julia a great amount—that is old ideology that is way in the past. I disagree with the entire—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Questions and comments? The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you. If there was somebody else, I would have yielded, but I can't resist making some comments, at least, on the speech.

I must say that the member for York-Simcoe is one of my favourites in the opposition benches. She's always moderate and so on. Like my friend from Timmins—James Bay, I'm in disagreement with perhaps the premise of some of her remarks.

I'm going to centre in on Family Day. Small-c conservatives across the country have hated Family Day. They don't like holidays. This is a day—I'll tell you, it's really appreciated. I wondered, when our government first brought it in, how it was going to play, and I'll tell you, I got lots of good comments from people. I understand those who are opposed, and I respect those who are opposed, but I'll tell you, as the member for Timmins—James Bay said, it's good to have that break from work, and I think it often makes people even more productive.

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What I see happening with the present version of the Conservative Party—and you'll notice I don't say Progressive Conservative Party; and I'll exempt my friend the member for York-Simcoe—is a move toward almost an admiration for the labour laws of Mississippi and Alabama, and South Carolina and Tennessee.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It is. That's exactly—because they have raced to the bottom. I can remember the government of William Davis. It was very balanced; it was a different kind of Progressive Conservative Party. So I understand these attacks on labour that take place with the government notes that come out. But on this particular piece of legislation, I hope the member votes for it—I don't know whether they have decided to or

not—despite the fact she may have some qualms about it. I think there's enough good in the bill that it should militate in favour of somebody as progressive as Julia voting for it—sorry, the member for York-Simcoe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again, to talk here about Bill 30, I think my esteemed colleague has it right. Gesture politics, as she duly notes, is something that is extremely, extremely well honed here by this government. Gesture politics is exactly how I would refer to it, and I hope my colleague will allow me in future to use her coined phrase.

So again, Mr. Speaker, and to the member from St. Catharines, to say that we don't actually care about holidays would be incorrect; holidays obviously are needed. But here is where the member from St. Catharines sort of strayed in his approach to Bill 30, and my esteemed colleague pointed out the fact that this bill once again doesn't actually address the needs and the desires of most Ontarians who find themselves in an unfortunate situation where a loved one has to be looked after.

All legislation, sometimes has parts that are flawed. We can appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Not all legislation can be or will be perfect, and I think that's the great thing about presenting legislation here in the chamber: that we do get a chance, an opportunity, to point out the different flaws or weaknesses in the legislation. There are a great number of weaknesses in Bill 30. This is why I think that people at home who are finding themselves in this situation, again, can't afford to take up to eight weeks off without pay—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm kind of reluctant to stand up and speak on this bill because it seems as though we've just been talking about this and talking about it and talking about it. My colleagues and I often have a discussion about how slowly government works, and it's certainly something that I was aware of—everybody's aware of it—before even entering public life, but this is ridiculous.

Earlier today we debated the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, Bill 2, and there was some discussion about how this was the most important bill that was put forward and yet we still haven't moved anywhere. We haven't moved on. It's a bill that's also light in substance, which is, incidentally, just like this bill; it's window dressing, as many have referred to it.

We need to wrap this up, I think. There needs to be a way that we can conduct some kind of a straw poll, because my sense is that we're not swaying anybody's minds on how they're going to vote on this particular legislation. I would bet that most people in this Legislature have already made up their minds, and there has to be a way that we could speed it up.

What I think we should do is send this off to committee. We can work out some of the kinks; for instance, something that was raised just recently about the fact that

employees would have to take full-week periods. There isn't that flexibility where if an employee needs a longer lunch hour or needs to leave early or, if they work shift work, they can only work certain times of the day—there's none of that flexibility. So let's send this to committee. Let's talk to the public, find out how we can make it better, if we can make it better, and let's get on with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from York-Simcoe has two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for Timmins-James Bay, the Minister of the Environment, the member for Northumberland-Quinte West and the member for Kenora-Rainy River.

Let me just say that with the comment made by the member for Timmins-James Bay that it was an all-or-nothing: Not at all, because over and over again in the conversations that other members included were those examples where there was something worked out with an employer.

Frankly, employers are generally very, very sympathetic. They want to agree with giving their employee the time that they can. Frankly, a good employee is somebody whom the employer doesn't want to lose, and so certainly in those situations where they can cover off and that kind of thing, that's quite frankly been the way in which it has been done for a long time, and then it has no rules like, "You have to take a week at a time," and things like that.

The minister wanted to make some suggestions about the southern states. By the way, I don't hate Family Day, but I can tell you that businesses have told me that there is a cost to Family Day, and it's important to put that on the record.

The issues raised by the member for Kenora-Rainy River—I couldn't agree with her more. There are many more weighty issues to be discussed in this Legislature than either the bill this morning or the bill this afternoon. But I want to thank all of those of you who did respond to my comments, and I appreciate that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Seeing none, Mrs. Jeffrey has moved second reading of Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Then it's carried.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No. There was a no.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I didn't hear a no. I heard a no-yes out of you. Which is it?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no, there was a no. Seriously, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."
In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the second reading of Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave, be deferred until Thursday, September 6, 2012." Agreed? Agreed.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Orders of the day?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Bradley has moved adjournment of the House. All in favour? Is it the pleasure of the House? I hear a no.

All those in favour will say "aye."

Those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Nobody stands up. Carried.

This House is adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1659.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 6 September 2012

Jeudi 6 septembre 2012



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 6 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 6 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer. Good morning.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 5, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member for—let me get this right—Bruce—

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Chatham—Kent—Essex.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chatham—Kent—Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): My apologies.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to talk this morning about the issues that are truly affecting seniors. It's the barrage of tax hikes after numerous promises from this government not to hike taxes. Most seniors I know don't like being misled about the hidden costs their government has levied against them, or perhaps it's the loss of opportunity that once existed in Ontario when they were younger.

I myself remember a time when my own riding of Chatham—Kent—Essex was a proud manufacturing hub, home to companies like Navistar that held promise for the future. Now, with the skyrocketing cost of energy and narrow-minded focus on so-called green technology, this government has cast away the promise of a better tomorrow for Ontario in favour of propping up a currently unsustainable series of green energy experiments.

I also hear from seniors about the increasing cost of the hydro that they require to run their air conditioners in hot summer months and for their washing machines once a week. Not every senior has a vast backyard to hang their clothes on a clothesline; some of them need to use

dryers—dryers that are now more expensive to run than ever.

Yet the response this government offers up is Bill 2, a bill that does a vanishingly small amount for a group that is smaller still. Picture it, Speaker, a group of wealthy seniors to whom \$10,000 is the amount spent on regular renovations to their homes. Such a contingent is not likely to require what help Bill 2 has to offer. A group of seniors barely getting by on a small pension while life gets more expensive by the day: a rebate of \$1,500 sounds grand until they realize that the \$10,000 they must spend to get it isn't a realistic expense.

Then there is a group of seniors somewhere in the middle, who may be able to afford \$10,000 in renovations and will likely get \$1,500 back for their troubles. Yet it's not all of them. It's a group who are afflicted by illness or injury. So the eligible contingent becomes even smaller. And considering that a \$10,000 renovation would likely accumulate \$1,300 in taxes, the senior in question would be netting perhaps \$200 in savings by the time they've spent many thousands of dollars. It is my humble opinion that Bill 2, the healthy home renovation tax credit, is nothing more than a feel-good bill that really won't help seniors stay in their homes longer, especially when they need real medical attention.

Seniors in Ontario need help, most certainly. Is this the most effective way to do it? My gut tells me no. I have seniors in my riding approaching me constantly about the health impact of industrial wind turbines in my riding, about the lost jobs their children and grandchildren are now facing, and about the increasing costs of electricity and everyday services that are taking more and more out of their pensions. It's my guess that this bill is nothing more now than it was the day it was introduced: a diversion from the very real challenges this government's incompetence has put in front of Ontario's seniors.

Our province is facing a deficit level it has never faced before: \$16 billion more out the door each year than we take in. Where would this funding come from? Few know the answer to that question. This is \$60 million that would be piled upon the deficit and thrown into the larger pile that represents our mounting provincial debt. All the while, this government remains focused on policies that damage and stall our economy, like rising energy costs, a refusal to implement a broad public sector wage freeze and half measures for students and seniors that do nothing to tackle the elephant in the room of a faltering economy.

May I suggest to the members opposite that there are better ways to help every Ontarian: moms, dads, grandmas and grandpas alike. Take the \$60 million that you claim to have found in a tax credit and focus on better home care, more beds in long-term-care homes. These are just two examples. And oh, by the way, you should have been guarding the henhouse a little closer. What more could be wasted on your eHealth and Ornge scandals? Take a look at what has done for Ontarians. Now you have to play surgeon and cut the services. Perhaps this ministry can offer a better idea on what the interest is in a program such as this. If estimates have the tax credit costing taxpayers \$135 million a year at full capacity, can we not have a conversation about how such money can be better spent?

Forgive me if I sound a little tongue-in-cheek, but I understand that \$135 million for this tax credit is something of a pipe dream, considering this government long ago looked on benignly as they spent Ontario completely out of money. You cannot help seniors, not at home nor in health centres, if you have so recklessly taken the tax dollars they spent years paying into the system and thrown them out the window at every problem that came along.

Our seniors face real challenges as a result of this government's incompetence. I believe that hoisting a bill such as this as a solution to the problems that plague our senior community is insulting. It's an insult to the very real needs that have long gone unrecognized and uncared for by this government. Why? Because this government cares about one thing and one thing only: staying in power. Whatever is politically convenient for them becomes the latest pet cause, sure to be noticed again by nobody, just as sure to cost the taxpayers of this province hundreds of millions of dollars.

0910

We saw it in the last election, when last-minute promises were made for the sake of political gain. I can recall one in particular that took the shape of an awfully large, expensive gas plant in Mississauga. We of course know now that spending \$190 million on a desperation move, made by the Liberal campaign manager, was so completely acceptable at a time when seniors are struggling. I might add that when questioning the energy minister and the finance minister about who's going to pay that \$190 million, without blinking an eye, they simply said, "the taxpayers."

So look about it: This government claims to be looking out for the best interests of seniors, when, purely for political gain, they threw away the equivalent of the first two years of this tax credit—\$190 million—and for what? So they wouldn't lose a single Mississauga seat? Well, I wonder what the seniors of Mississauga thought when they heard that news. I can't imagine they felt Ontario was a better, healthier place for seniors. In fact, they see a logjam in our long-term-care homes; they see an approaching precipice of fiscal calamity; and they see their home energy bills growing more expensive with each passing year. They see a government that has mort-

gaged the bright future of their children and grandchildren for the sake of political pet projects and complete, utter incompetence. This is no longer the province our seniors worked and fought for; it's a place that the members opposite have made certain our seniors no longer recognize.

I will vote against this bill because I recognize there are serious challenges facing our senior community, and they require real responses.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to comment on the comments from the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex. I agree with him on a lot of the things he said.

This \$10,000 that they're going to give out—as it's been said a hundred times in this House, who can afford the \$10,000? Most of the people in our province, elderly people, would have to borrow the money in the first place. Some of them may not qualify to even borrow the money to do the improvements on their house to stay in their house because they don't have the income to cover it, and of course banks always want collateral. If there's no collateral, there's no loan. How do they pay it back when they can't pay for their hydro bills, when they can't pay for their daily food? How are they going to pay for it? Not only can't they borrow the money, they can't pay for the loan and they can't get access to finances, unless they're fortunate enough to have kids that will take care of their parents, and sometimes that doesn't happen.

We're certainly not going to take money out of anyone's hands who needs it, so we would have to support this in its minuscule presentation. But with all due respect, this is another example of a fluff Liberal bill to gain support from the general public so they can get re-elected, and it's really pathetic. It almost reminds me of that \$50 or \$70 sports deal they're going to give a rebate for. Like I said before, I'd be lucky if I could sharpen my skates seven times in a whole season, and there's that money shot. The registration is \$500 or \$600. If you want to do something for kids, help them with their registration. Help the lots of kids in our province who can't even afford to play hockey because their parents aren't in a position to give them the financial support. We've even got people in my community where the service clubs are helping them. It's pathetic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to comment on Bill 2 and the comments by the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex. We need to actually think about what I just said. This is Bill 2. The people watching maybe don't know what that means. Bill 1 is always a pro forma bill, which says nothing, after the speech from the throne by the Lieutenant Governor. Bill 2, therefore, is the first substantive bill to be filed in this House after the election. We're here almost a year later, in the fall of 2012, talking about a bill that was the first substantive bill to be tabled following the election in 2011.

And what are we doing here? Why are we still here talking? We're talking because the official opposition, the Progressive Conservatives, are going to vote against the bill, but they don't want to be caught voting against the bill because they know the public likes it. While there are—oh, I can't mention by-elections; I'm sorry, Speaker. While there are certain discussions going on in a couple of ridings, they don't want to be caught voting against the bill, which everybody knows they're going to do. So they're just talking and talking and talking. Quite frankly, the NDP, who everybody knows will vote for the bill, aren't any help in speeding it up, because they like to make speeches about how they're the only defenders of the poor.

Well, do you know what? Middle-class parents like me, who might want to help their parents stay in their home, can get this tax credit too, and I have no problem defending the middle class.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments. The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very surprised that I have the opportunity, but I won't for one moment miss the opportunity to compliment the member from our side, from Chatham-Kent-Essex. He started with what I think is the most important starting point, talking about the seniors in his riding, and how difficult it is. The member from the NDP also tried to relate Ontario today: young children who can't afford to play hockey. What has happened to Ontario? One should stop and look.

Bill 2 is a showpiece. I can't understand why they're not calling more important bills, like Bill 50 to get to the bottom of the Ornge scandal. Why aren't they calling government business? It should be on the record that this bill has been on the order paper for almost a year. It's shameful that the government, which is in charge—at least it's supposed to be, to call the bill, extend the number of hours or terminate the number of hours of debate on the bill.

This bill has three serious problems. It doesn't recognize the dilemma for seniors today. First of all, if you can afford to do the renovations, this bill probably isn't required. The \$60 million committed to the bill in the budget isn't accounted for. Where are you going to get that money? You already have a deficit closing in on \$15 billion. The third-highest expenditure in Ontario's budget is the cost of servicing our accumulated debt. It's almost \$11 billion. We're spending, every hour, about \$1.5 million more than we're taking in—every single hour. In fact, in this hour this morning, another million-plus dollars is being borrowed from somebody, some foreigner, some person from some other country, some other nation.

When I think of my family, I think of how hard it is in Ontario to pay the electricity bill. This bill isn't required.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions or comments. The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I'm always interested in what all members have to say in this House, but even more interested in the argument put forward by the

Conservatives. On one hand, they're the tax cuts party. They're the guys who want to give everybody tax cuts in order to drive the economy and build a better Ontario. But here they are voting against tax cuts. I just think the Tory position is rather funny, because on one hand, they argue that tax cuts are good, but when it's not their tax cut, tax cuts are bad. That's kind of interesting.

There was an interesting article in the paper two weeks ago that talked about the Ontario deficit being \$15-billion-plus, and then went back and looked at how much the Tory and Liberal tax cuts implemented in Ontario over the last 15 years cost the Ontario treasury. Guess what the number was? Fifteen billion dollars. It has always been, in my view, a very clever ruse on the part of the right wing: If you offer tax cuts, it's a very popular thing to do for the public. But what it does is it undermines public financing for things like roads, things like transit, things like hospitals, things like schools—those frivolous things that they always attack as being public services that are somehow bad. So I found this particular presentation rather odd.

0920

The other thing I would say is, listen, I believe that every member should always have the opportunity to speak in the House, and I'm not going to argue for a second that Tories should stop speaking to this bill. That is their right, and I will never stand against that. But I just want to say, on our part, we've said what we've had to say on this bill. As the member from Hamilton East said, this is a step forward. It is not a huge step. It is going to help some seniors, and on the basis of helping some seniors, we're going to vote for it. But there's a lot of other things that this government could have done that could have made things easier for seniors, and we at this point will just respond to the comments from the Conservatives and Liberals, but we're done with debate. We're ready for the vote.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Chatham-Kent-Essex, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Guelph, Durham and, of course, Timmins-James Bay.

I was listening to the comments by my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, and very compassionately he said, "I agree with the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex," as it related to seniors. He's one of them as well, but we both are, and so we both can relate to the empathy that is shown—

Mr. Paul Miller: Not yet.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Well, you collect one of the cheques anyway.

But looking at it, we say that we're very concerned about the health and the welfare of the seniors in our communities, not just in Chatham-Kent-Essex, but even as far north as Timmins-James Bay.

But on a serious note, the member from Guelph commented on how this is a very substantive bill, and I have to question that. I truly do. Let's get real. This bill is a

feel-good bill. It was brought out early, right after the 2011 election, and it was kind of like, "Well, let's do something nice. Ontarians put us back into government. Let's do something nice."

But I want to get serious, and we as a PC caucus want to get serious and tackle the real issues, the real problems, that are facing Ontario today: a \$16-billion deficit—that's serious; that's real. Let's do the job that we were elected to do in this Legislature. Let's represent the people from our ridings and our communities by dealing with more substantive bills, not something like this.

You look at the fact that we're facing another \$16-billion deficit, and yet, just before the election, they cancelled a \$190-million gas plant. Now, that's the "relocation costs"; the Minister of Finance has made that very clear. I don't suspect that those are the real costs; there's more to be found out.

But my point is, we're throwing money away, and what we need to do is to get serious about doing business. That's why I will not support Bill 2.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Back in February, I believe we spoke about this bill, and it seems to be not that important even to this present government. It's Bill 2, and it's been on the books for almost a year now, so I wonder how much importance they have in this bill.

However, I was reading Hansard to prepare for today, and I was interested in a comment by the member from Thornhill, our finance critic. I'd like to read the comment he made back in May. "Seniors—the definition being 65-plus—qualify for this tax credit proposed by the bill. That's about 13% of Ontario's population in total, or about 1.8 million people.... But there are some very mitigating circumstances, one of which is that the median senior income in Ontario—meaning that most seniors living in Ontario are in this category—is \$25,000 per individual and \$45,000 per couple.... That translates into approximately \$2,000 to \$3,700 of income—gross income—per month, depending on whether you're a single senior or part of a senior couple. In order to qualify for the maximum tax credit of \$1,500, which is 15% of the maximum expenditure of \$10,000, a senior actually has to have \$10,000 to spend. That is the problem. That really is the problem, as one of my colleagues has said. So they have to have that. When the senior spends \$10,000, he or she actually winds up out of pocket to the tune of \$8,500."

Speaker, my wife and I operated a decorating business for 20-some years. I can remember when the HST came into being back in 2009, July 1. A great present for Canada Day was that we got the HST out of that one. We worked for quite a demographic of people: We worked for seniors; we worked for young people. Most people want to know, when we estimate a job, what it's going to cost them. "What do I have to write the cheque out for?" They're not interested in all the little other things like how fast you can do a job or whatever else; they want to know what it's going to cost them. Well, after July 1,

2009, we had to start putting the HST on. You know, we lost business over that. Our business had been going since the early 1990s, and that was the first time that we'd ever had to lay off people, that winter, in our business. It was the first time, because people were backing off this high tax rate they were paying.

You would think this government could come up with a better idea. This bill is only going to affect a small portion of our population. You would think they would come up with some kind of a tax relief system that would affect more people in our system. However, we see this bill as something that they're hoping seniors will not see through; they'll jump up and down and say, "Gee, maybe we'd better vote for this government the next time, because look what they're giving to us."

Interjection: Aren't they great?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: They're just wonderful people.

Anyway, then we come along to this tax bill. That was the first hit we took, was on the HST. The next thing we were faced with in our business was when energy rates started going up. Again, we'd go in and estimate for our work, and they would say, "Gee, we called you two or three weeks ago to come in and give us an estimate, but we just got our hydro bills in from our smart meters. We can't afford that extra couple of hundred dollars right now that it might take to paint our rooms." All the time, these people are being hit with more and more and more.

So you come back, and the government decides, "Maybe we'd better do something. We'd better get these people back outside." So they bring out Bill 2, the second bill, as was pointed out, in the Legislature last fall. They've been kind of letting it sit there, and they're bringing it back now. It does nothing, actually, to help anybody, because seniors especially are backing off spending money because they don't have the money to spend. And they're frightened. They are not getting their money from their investments like they used to because of low return rates on investments, but they are certainly afraid that if they have to borrow this money—and I think we all know interest rates are going to go up at some point. I hope they don't go up soon, because one point in interest rate to this government is about half a billion dollars, and we certainly don't need that at this point, because of this mismanagement.

Wouldn't it have been better to have had a plan in place, to not let Ornge get out of hand, not let eHealth get out of hand, and whatever other scandals this government has faced? We probably wouldn't be in this mess we're in right now.

0930

So a senior has a choice of looking at this as either if they have the money to put \$10,000 into a project such as this, they probably don't need the tax credit, or if they have to borrow it—most seniors don't want to be borrowing money right now. They went through that in their past lifetime. They've got to deal with, "Jeez, what if the interest rate goes up? What am I going to be facing then?"

I was also interested in some parts of this bill—you would think home renovations would include most

things, but it doesn't. It doesn't include new windows, which may save them on their hydro bill, energy costs. It doesn't include more insulation. You would think that would be in this bill. No, it's not.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: What is in the bill?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Well, there's not much in the bill at all. It's just sort of a bill that this present government hopes everybody will jump on. But, you know, I haven't had one call in my office about this bill, and I don't know whether any of my caucus colleagues have had any calls about Bill 2. But I do get calls about high energy costs. I do get calls about people who are being put out of work due to the horse racing fiasco going on right now—lots of calls about that. I don't get calls on Bill 2. That makes me think, what's the importance of this bill? There isn't any importance to this bill.

People are more worried about their future than having to go out and spend \$10,000 to get a 15% tax credit, I believe it is, or borrowing it or whatever. They're more concerned about whether they're going to be able to live for the next few years in comfort. So I fail to see the importance of this bill, especially when the constituents I represent—they're the ones who are going to vote me in next time. They're the ones who criticize me if I do something wrong and they're the ones who applaud me if I do something right. Nobody—nobody—has called about this bill. It just doesn't exist for the people in my riding, Perth-Wellington.

We need to put policies in place that get control of government spending. We've already seen this present government resist doing that. They've already spent probably over \$2 billion since the last budget, which Mr. Drummond says we can't afford. They hired Mr. Drummond—I think it was 1,500 bucks a day or something they hired him for—and they don't listen to him. What does that mean to the people of Ontario? It means this government doesn't listen to Mr. Drummond and won't listen to us. We need help, but this bill just doesn't do it.

This government doesn't seem to be able to solve a problem without throwing more money at it. You know something? That's just not how things should work. You've got to get control of your finances. The ordinary person in Ontario knows that. You can't max out your credit card and use another card to pay it off. That just doesn't work. That's what we're seeing here: We're seeing this government borrow money to pay off debt. I think the ordinary person in Ontario wants this government or any government to get spending under control, and then maybe we can have some programs that really do have some meat in them. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to comment on the member from Perth-Wellington's presentation. He hit on some good things there, but one in particular. He talked about the HST.

Let's build a picture here. They're going to borrow the \$10,000—they can't borrow because they don't have the equity to borrow the money in the first place, but let's

say they did get the \$10,000. Okay, they've got the 10,000 bucks and now they're going to build something in the house. Then they're going to hire people to come and do the work, so they're going to pay for that too, and HST on top of that. Then they're going to pay for all the supplies—wood, metal, whatever it takes to do the job—and they're going to pay HST on that. The government says, "We're going to give you a rebate on the \$10,000," but they don't talk about all the hidden charges that are going to eat away. If you have to borrow the money, Speaker, you've got to pay the bank back. So this \$10,000 now turns into maybe \$12,000 or \$14,000 that you owe. So really, when you borrow the \$10,000, you're now down another \$4,000 on top of that, for services, for tradesmen, for bank loans, whatever you had to do with the money.

So this pathetic little thing they're doing is another social media charge. That's all this is, like the other bill, when they were going to do this for families across Ontario for sports. Like I said, 50 bucks? Come on. What am I going to do with 50 bucks? Sharpen my skates? Maybe buy one hockey stick? Do you know how many times I sharpened my skates in a season when I played? Once a week. And I was a referee. When I played, because I was a rather hard, tough defenceman, I'd go through a lot of sticks, too. My nickname was Lumber Mill. But anyway, the bottom line was, it would cost me hundreds and hundreds of dollars. If you've got two kids in rec hockey or three kids in rec hockey, that isn't even going to put a small dent in the cost. Sometimes it's \$10,000 a year to have three kids play hockey. Give me a break.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It was a delight to hear the remarks this morning by my good friend from Perth-Wellington. It's interesting what people get calls about. I've gotten a lot of calls on this particular one. I was just chatting to my good friend the other day, Hank Simmons. Hank Simmons is a home renovator, a carpenter here in Peterborough. Hank is actually doing a little bit of work in our house for Karan and myself. Hank was telling me, "You know, when I was in Rona the other day, and Home Depot and Home Hardware, I saw all these displays of things that would help seniors stay in their homes for a longer period of time."

He saw those grab bars. He saw those new bathtubs that have the swinging door to allow people to have better access because they have mobility challenges. When you talk to a guy like Hank Simmons, he's been in the carpentry business for, I don't know, 30 or 40 years. He lives on Montgomery Street in Peterborough, a great guy—does great work. Anybody who wants home renovations in Peterborough, I'd certainly recommend Hank Simmons.

He was at Rona and he was at Home Depot and he was at Home Hardware, and he said, "I see a real opportunity with this tax credit for seniors coming in, an opportunity to buy those bathtubs, to buy those grab bars, to

do some electrical work and indeed to keep people, those seniors, in their home for a longer period of time.”

I know the member for Perth–Wellington certainly looked at sub-subclause 2(7)(1)(i)(A) of the bill. This bill will “enable a senior (for whom that residence is the principal residence, or who reasonably expects that residence to become his or her principal residence) to gain access to, or to be” more “mobile or functional within” the residency of that home.

Those are important things. Now, we need to carve out a middle position here on this bill, between the Tea Party and the occupiers. I think this is a very good example of Bill 2 being that responsible middle position.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole: I still want to pay respect to the member for Perth–Wellington, because he put it where it really belongs. This is another flowers-in-the-window Liberal bill. But he has told the members here today on the Liberal side that he has not had one call on it. I can say, from the riding of Durham, I’ve not had one call. I have had calls on energy bills. I have had calls on the high cost of auto insurance. I’ve had high calls on a lot of issues that respect the McGuinty government.

More recently, the doctors in my riding are just apoplectic about the changes to the OHIP fee schedule. I say this: If they want to help the poor and if they want to help the aging, they should have policies that directly and simply assist those people. One easy way would be to allow seniors to reduce the HST on their home heating bill: simply implemented, easily administered; help immediately and help all of them—simple rules like that as opposed to this one here. If you read the implications on this bill itself, it’s going to be hard to get the money, because if you don’t buy the right grab bars, as Mr. Leal said, you probably won’t qualify. And if you’ve spent \$10,000 and you’re to get 10% back, that wouldn’t even cover the HST you paid.

So this bill, in all fairness, is a waste of our time. It really is a waste of our time, and it’s almost like a charade or a false advertisement to the seniors. They’re giving them the idea that they’re going to help them. Now they’re charging seniors who have to move to a retirement home a tax; it’s a seniors’ tax on people living in retirement homes. And they aren’t building one more new long-term-care bed. You don’t care about seniors, and I think you’ve lost control of the whole idea of helping vulnerable people.

0940

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Yesterday, when we talked about this, and actually earlier today, it was raised that seniors have to spend \$10,000 in order to save \$1,500. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek mentioned a litany of things that go and eat into this \$1,500 that they would get back, whether it’s the tradespeople or the taxes or any number of things—taxes on multiple levels. Still, at the end of the day, seniors would be out of pocket

\$8,500, if they were able to scrounge together the \$10,000, and with hydro bills going up 46%.

I know in my area transportation is a huge issue for seniors because we have many small communities that are separated by hundreds of kilometres, and public transportation is just not available, so seniors often either have to have a vehicle and pay the insurance and pay the high prices of gas, or else they have to pay someone else to transport them back and forth.

Yesterday I did mention that if we divide up the \$60 million by all of the ridings, that comes down to about \$560,000 per riding, which is a lot of money—a lot of money that can do a lot of good if we were to tighten up some of the eligibility requirements. Why don’t we take this money and target it so that we can help seniors who really need it? Why don’t we make changes?

As I said also, when I worked with my predecessor, even though it’s a federal program, we had a steady stream of people who came in to access the CMHC’s RRAP program, the residential rehabilitation assistance program. What we found was that the program was always exasperated. It would reset on April 1 of every year, and we would tell people, “Well, the program is exhausted for this fiscal year. Apply next fiscal year.” They would apply at the beginning of April, and what do you know? The program was exhausted. We did some digging. We found out that they keep the applications for six months, and we had to get people to start applying in October. So we need to make some changes to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Perth–Wellington, you’ve got two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to thank those who spoke to my presentation from Hamilton East, Peterborough, Durham and Kenora–Rainy River.

I too, like the member from Hamilton East, spent part of my time on a hockey rink as a referee, and although I had no famous nicknames like the member from Hamilton East had, I’m sure that we saw a lot of things in the hockey arena and on the ice that gave us pause at times. As you know, in the rules it says the referee may call a penalty. It doesn’t say he has to call a penalty, so we could use discretion on some of the calls that we used to make. We interpreted those rules. A sign of a good referee, actually, is that people don’t know they’re out there. They don’t know the referee is out there because he’s letting the game play and the players play. He lets a few things go once in a while, and interprets the rules as he sees fit. That’s kind of what I’m leading to. What I’m leading to on that is Bill 2—if I had to be a referee and have a bill such as this that has no substance to it, I would have a difficult time enforcing the rules on it.

I see that any contractors who think they’re going to make a bunch of money out of this are going to look at this and say, “Oh.” There’s going to be a lot of head-scratching going on, Speaker, because of the rules that apply to this, or lack of rules that apply to this bill.

I think the government should concentrate on job creation, getting our energy costs down, and measures such

as that to get this province going again. This bill certainly doesn't do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise in my place today to speak to this important piece of legislation that just forms a small part of the aging-at-home direction that Ontario seniors are pleased to go in. We as legislators understand that. The aging-at-home programs are extremely important, and this is just another part of that.

Alex Munter and I sat on the social services committee in the city of Ottawa back in the first three years of the city of Ottawa, the new amalgamated city. I was with him just about a year and a half ago, when he was the CEO of the local health integration network. He had 600 seniors together in Ottawa. He was up giving a speech, and he asked the whole crowd for a show of hands of how many of these seniors didn't want to age in their own homes, and of course no hands went up. That's something all seniors want to do.

This is a bill that will enable seniors to start looking ahead and start planning. We just have to look—I don't want to bore people with this, but I think it's important for people to know. You hear from the other side that it's a \$15,000 project, and you have to have your \$15,000. There are so many small things that you can do in your home as you age, to make your home a better place for you as you lose the ability to look after yourself well.

Examples of eligible expenses: certain renovations to permit first-floor occupancy or secondary suites, granny flats or in-law suites; grab bars and related reinforcements around the toilet, bathtub, shower—before accidents happen, seniors can install these things; handrails in corridors, wheelchair ramps, wheelchair lifts and elevators, bath lifts, walk-in bathtubs, wheel-in showers; widening passage doors; lowering existing counters and cupboards or installing adjustable cupboards; and placing light switches and electrical outlets in accessible locations. That's only the start of the list that I have here.

This is to make our homes better. You have to make that decision at some time: Do I make adjustments to my own home to stay there, or do I move? It's a situation that my wife and I are going through, now that we're looking, in our senior years, for: Where do we live? One of the issues with us is a two-storey home, so it's that lift that may be needed sometime, or are you better on one floor? Those are the things seniors think of, and certainly that is part of the thinking that I have. Seniors want to spend the rest of their days in their own home.

This is a small part of our program, as a government, for seniors, but an important one. This bill lets seniors plan ahead and encourages seniors to plan ahead. A lot of those things that I mentioned are not \$10,000 items; they're \$500 items. A non-slip floor in the bathroom: a \$500 item. They will be able to get that work done and get a rebate.

If it's taken up in a similar way that the federal 2009 home renovation tax credit program was—and I got criticized for using that program, but I did certain things

with that federal renovation tax credit to make my home better, to make it more energy-efficient—up to 308,000 people could benefit from this program in the first year. It was a bill that we wanted passed. We've lost a good part of our first year, but 308,000 people are a lot of seniors who could start thinking of living at home and making those decisions that are going to help them do that.

Demographics, of course, is something that we have to be thinking of. I was looking at one of the slides that was presented in the past in estimates, I believe. Our population is changing. Below 65 years of age, over the next 20 years: about a 10% increase. They're the people that are going to be paying all these things. Above the age of 65: That will grow by almost 50% in the next 20 years. We have to make sure that we take aging-at-home very seriously and get seniors participating in that to a greater degree. A lot of seniors do take part in it now, but we could certainly get more seniors doing it.

0950

The cost of the healthy homes renovations tax credit is offset by cuts in other parts of the budget. In 2011-12, it's \$60 million; in 2012-13, \$125 million; and in 2013-14, \$135 million, so it's a significant assistance to seniors to move forward.

The other part of this is job creation. We always forget about the job creation part, but who will be working on this? Well, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, manufacturers—our neighbours—and this is important. That's 10,500 jobs per year with this program. You can say it's an insignificant program; it is not. First of all, it educates seniors to look ahead. It helps the seniors to look ahead. It helps the seniors to plan. Even the discussion of this tax credit—to say we don't have calls—I've met seniors who are saying, "When is this program coming out? We want to do something. When is the program coming out?" So there is interest. I can't say that I got 100 calls on it, but certainly I've had 10 conversations with seniors asking when it's coming.

It's important. It's going to make large changes in how seniors look at their future, how they look at what they can do to help them stay in their homes, where they want to be, to help with other programs that are out there—aging-at-home. We can do a lot with seniors. Seniors have to become more involved in this, because with the demographics that we see, with the doubling of seniors in the next 20 years, we cannot have people going into long-term-care homes too early. If we work hard with the seniors, if we work hard through seniors' organizations—I've got about 3,000 seniors in Orléans who are organizing four different clubs. They don't like to call them clubs, but they get assistance from the government. We can help the seniors do more with seniors. It's going to be very important. I think that's what this program is about, and I certainly look forward to seeing the uptake of 10,500 jobs, 308,000 seniors participating, if it's on the same basis as the federal program, which was quite successful in 2009.

It's not major expenditures all the time: door locks that are easy to operate; lever handles on doors and taps

instead of knobs; pull-out shelves under counters to enable work from a seated position; a hand-held shower on an adjustable rod or high-low mounting brackets; additional light fixtures throughout the home and exterior entrances; swing-clear hinges on doors to widen doorways; creation of knee space under the basin to enable use from a seated position; insulation on hot water pipes; relocation of taps to the front or side of a sink for easier access; hands-free taps; motion-activated lighting; touch-and-release drawers, and cupboards and drawers that pull out fully; and modular or removable versions of a permanent fixture, such as modular ramps and non-fixed bath lifts.

If the expenditures are \$2,000 or \$3,000, then seniors can keep the bills, or, if someone is sharing a home with a senior, they keep the bills. They make the application at the end of the year, and on a \$3,000 expenditure, there will be \$450 coming back. That's not immaterial; that will encourage more seniors to do what they should do: start planning now and start making their homes more acceptable to them as they age. If we can do that, we certainly can keep people out of hospitals, at over \$1,000 a day, or long-term-care beds, which are extremely expensive.

The senior issue is important. We've taken this one important step in bringing this legislation in. It will encourage seniors to do better planning. It will help them to make the changes to their homes, and we'll find out that seniors can stay in their homes longer. It's only one of the small pieces of legislation that we've brought in over the years to encourage this action. We have to keep seniors in their homes a lot longer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the speech from the member for Ottawa-Orléans on Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit, as it's called.

I would simply like to come back to some points he was making. He was talking about a senior spending maybe \$500 on bathroom renovations, and I simply believe that this approach, for the vast majority of seniors out there—first of all, if they do spend that \$500, the benefit is going to be \$75, and they'll pay \$65 in HST on that \$500. But I simply don't believe that the majority of seniors out there, to get that \$75 benefit, are going to know how to go through the motions of doing the paperwork involved to actually benefit from the tax credit. The only way you're going to get reasonable participation is you're going to have to spend an awful lot of money on advertising.

So my question to the government would be, how much money are you going to have to spend to promote this, to make it worthwhile? Maybe that's what your goal is, because as the member from Hamilton East pointed out—I believe he called it a Liberal fluff bill—it's more about getting publicity for looking like you're doing something than actually doing something. Certainly, I think, to get participation, you're going to have to spend all kinds of money on advertising, which is probably

exactly what you want to do because you'll be able to talk about how wonderful you are and the great things you're doing when, in fact, it's a relatively minor benefit for a select few who will actually be able to participate in this tax cut.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm grateful for the opportunity to make some comments on the comments from the member for Ottawa-Orléans. There are a few things that I agree with in his comments, but one thing I really agree with is he said that this is a small piece of legislation, and that's what it is. It's a small piece of legislation with a really long title. That's the problem with these types of legislation. This should just be part of a bigger piece that actually really did something for a bigger portion of seniors, because the biggest part that takes seniors out of their homes is they can't afford to pay for the heat, they can't afford to pay for the lights and they can't get home care. You know what? In most cases, the senior does not move out of their home because the taps are on the wrong side of the tub, and in a lot of cases, if that's what it is, they're not even going to worry about the tax credit. They're going to change it.

If you really want to have comprehensive legislation, then you make the everyday needs of seniors cheaper, like taking the HST off their heat in areas like mine where we can't access gas, so a senior, and a lot did when they were younger—a lot of us heat with wood. But when you're a senior, you have to heat with oil. I don't see anything in the healthy homes renovation tax credit that helps with oil. It's things like that.

If you really want to keep seniors in their homes—I'm not saying this is a bad piece of legislation, but it's a very small, small piece of legislation with a lot of PR potential attached to it. That's the problem. Is this going to help some seniors? Yes. Is this going to help seniors in general as part of our strategy to keep them in their homes? No. Is it going to be used as a lot of PR? Yes, and that's the problem with this type of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It was a delight to hear the comments this morning from my good friend and colleague from Ottawa-Orléans. I thought it was a very articulate, very profound speech, talking about Bill 2 and our assistance for seniors.

I find it very interesting. If you go out and talk to seniors' groups—someone made a comment about moving a tap. Well, when you go out and talk to people who are involved with seniors, having a tap in the wrong location can lead to a fall, and often when seniors have falls, they break hips, and often when you break a hip, that can start the downward spiral for many seniors, and they find themselves in a very difficult position.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has been doing some analysis in Ontario over the last little while that indicates that up to 37% of the population that is currently in long-term-care homes, if they had other sup-

ports, could in fact remain in their homes for a longer period of time. The member from Ottawa–Orléans, who spends a lot of time with the seniors' groups in his Ottawa riding, understands, when he's having a dialogue and a discussion and listens to those seniors and those groups in Ottawa–Orléans, that they are embracing this bill. It's an opportunity to make major changes or an opportunity to make minor changes in order to retrofit their home, to make sure it's more accessible and usable as we change in life—as our mobility perhaps decreases—but certainly don't want at this particular time to go into a retirement home or a long-term-home setting.

1000

Bill 2 is a real opportunity. It will be good for the economy. It will be good for tradespeople. It will be good for the people at Rona, Home Hardware and Home Depot. It's an opportunity to increase their traffic within their retail operations, to provide those goods that certainly tradesmen will take advantage of to improve their homes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I appreciate the comments from our colleague from Ottawa–Orléans.

I do understand the motives. I have a soft spot for seniors. I have a lot of them in my riding. Our particular riding has in fact been hit hard through unemployment, which leads me to believe and think that there are a lot of people that are more concerned in my riding about where and how they're going to pay the next food bill, pay their hydro costs, pay their taxes and be able to stay in their homes.

I appreciate the fact that they're talking about wanting to make homes safer. I get that. I do; I get that. But you know what? I think we need to be looking at more substantive measures. What are we doing to really increase the jobs in our areas, to bring in real jobs, not just the home handy-guy that can install a handle in a wall to make it safer for a senior?

Also, the member from Ottawa–Orléans used an example. He said they could perhaps get a non-slip floor in their bathroom and it might cost around \$500. So I did the quick math: 15% on \$500 is about \$75, but they're also going to have to pay 13% tax on that \$500, which is \$65. So if we look at the economics of the situation, here we have a senior spending \$500 to make their bathroom floor safer—I get that, and I think that's a wise move—but in fact, because of the difference between the rebate of \$75 and the tax of \$65 they're going to pay, they're only going to net \$10 out of this thing. Therefore, their \$500 floor only costs them \$490. I'm looking at it and saying we need to be looking at things in much better ways.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Ottawa–Orléans, you have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to respond to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for his good comments. I give seniors more credit than you do. I'm sure that this program will be picked up without a lot of advertising.

They will see the opportunities here. I've heard the other side trying to bring down those numbers, but the fact is, it's a 15% rebate. It was very, very successful as part of the federal program, and it's going to be successful here.

To the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane: 308,000 seniors are expected to be taking up this program. It's a big program, from that perspective, and it's the education that we'll see, and it's the thinking of seniors that, "Yeah, we're going to stay in our home. We're going to make our homes ready for us." And 10,500 jobs are not to be laughed at. That's a lot of jobs. Those are good jobs for carpenters, plumbers. These aren't inconsequential jobs; they're extremely important. It's part of the big plan. We're keeping moving ahead with the Aging at Home part.

I want to thank the member from Peterborough, the best whip I've ever had. I really enjoyed his comments this morning.

The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex: Again, I want to say that these are important jobs. Whether the job is small or the job is large, whether the improvement is small or the improvement is big, these are very important projects for seniors. If we get 308,000 of them thinking that way and going ahead with these improvements, this is important.

We have to help seniors age at home. This is a good, good start on getting some of those things done so that your home is better for you. I ask all members to support this important legislation. It is going to help people like me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007, to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit.

Heckling from behind, the member from Hamilton East, speaking to the last speaker, said we're going to become seniors, waiting for this bill to pass, as it was introduced I believe last November, and it has almost been a year. So it's obviously not a big priority with the government or they would have called it earlier, especially if you look at some of the silly resolutions they've had us spending time in this place debating, including some in the past week that really were fluff resolutions.

This bill, just to go through it a little bit, is about a tax credit, the home renovation tax credit for seniors. It is very specific in that you have to be 65 years or older to qualify, and it applies to very specific improvements to your home.

One interesting feature of it is there is no income test. As has been pointed out, you can spend up to a maximum of \$10,000 to be able to benefit from the 15% tax credit, so the most you could benefit from this tax credit is \$1,500, if you spend the \$10,000.

If you're a wealthy senior and you need to do the renovations so you can stay in your home, so you can make it more accessible—which is another one of the stipulations of this bill—you're going to spend the

money anyways, because you want to stay in your home and because you can afford to. But for those that really need it, which is a lot of people out there—a lot of people, certainly, in Parry Sound–Muskoka—they're struggling to get by, and they don't have the money to be able to spend the \$10,000. They're struggling month to month on a fixed pension and are faced with increased energy bills and other costs. That's certainly what I hear about in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. Particularly electricity bills are one of the big things that I absolutely do hear about.

This bill is really targeted to a very small segment of the population—seniors—but then also a very, very small group. I think for those to actually benefit from it, you're going to have to have some money to be able to spend on these renovations.

I would also simply say, as I was saying in the comments I made a few minutes ago, that this is really not the right approach, because for a lot of people out there, they're not going to be aware of this tax credit, or they're not going to save the paperwork to be able to benefit from it. Really, the only way you get good participation with a very small segmented piece of legislation like this is to spend a lot of money on advertising, so then you're spending money on advertising, as the government, instead of actually helping people.

I think there are much more efficient ways of actually helping people that need help. One would be to leave the money in the hands of the people that are earning it so they can spend it as they wish. Another might be, as has been suggested, removing the HST on electricity and heating costs, which would benefit everyone, and you wouldn't have to save your receipts and go through a process—and be aware of it—to actually be able to benefit from it.

I think the approach the government is taking, as the member from Hamilton East pointed out, is really more about publicity. It's more of a fluff bill to generate some positive response from the people at large. I think if it was a big priority for them, first of all it would have been passed by now. Bill 2 was introduced last November, and it still hasn't made its way through the Legislature, so it's obviously not a big priority.

In my riding, what are seniors really concerned about? Well, they're concerned about access to health care, for sure. That's something that really comes up. Most recently in Parry Sound–Muskoka, we're seeing big cutbacks in things like cataract surgery. So all of a sudden there are big wait times for cataract surgery in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, on the Muskoka side in particular. I've learned from the health authorities that last year in Parry Sound–Muskoka, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare was allocated some 952 cataract surgeries in 2011-12, and that has been cut back for this year, for 2012-13, to 409 cases—a huge, huge reduction in the number of cataract surgeries.

So I'm hearing from seniors who are writing to me saying, "I was scheduled to have a cataract surgery, and now it's cancelled. How do I get it? This is something

that I have to have done or I'm going to lose my sight." There are no options about this. It's not something they want to do. I would say funding those cataract surgeries is more important than this legislation and the advertising and other money that's going to have to be spent on it to make it work. So fund the cataract surgeries and reduce those waiting lists, because that is something I've had several letters, emails and calls to my office about, and it's something that people are really concerned about, particularly in the Muskoka side of the riding.

Other issues that seniors are concerned about: access and quality of long-term care. Just last week I was at an anniversary—I think it was the 35th anniversary of Fairvern long-term-care home in Huntsville. There, the staff do a wonderful job of looking after their clientele, and they have a terrific group of volunteers who were recognized, some of whom have been there the entire time that Fairvern has been open, amazingly. But it is now becoming an older facility. It was originally the hospital, before it was made into a long-term-care home. So it's in need of rebuilding.

That's something that I think might be a priority for the government for the existing budget that they have out there—because one thing we know: the government's in a deficit position. We've heard that lots of times. They have a \$15-billion deficit, so it's not like there's money out there that they can spend. They're actually spending borrowed money, and that's something that has to be dealt with. It's something our party has been making suggestions about, to deal with this big deficit.

I think there are lots of better ways, simpler ways, more effective and efficient ways to help seniors, to spend the money, versus this bill, which is quite restrictive and quite complicated, really, for the seniors who would be trying to access it. I just think that it's probably more about PR than it is anything else. For that reason, our party will not be supporting this bill.

I'm pleased to have had a few moments to comment this morning. Thank you.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to introduce two members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees here. We have Chris Watson and we have Terri Preston; and also, from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, who has been sitting here all week, Craig Rockwell up in the stands.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to welcome my friends Dr. You-Zhi Tang and Mr. James Jiang visiting the House today. Please join me in welcoming them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier, and I'll put my question to the Premier. Premier, our province is in trouble; that is clear. You've taken Ontario to the edge of a precipice—

Interjection: Where's the Premier?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Where's the front bench?

Mr. Peter Shurman: You've taken Ontario to the edge of a precipice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Could I have the clock reset, please?

I was about to recognize a point of order, but I also recommend to the member that I was going to see that the Premier was here. Now that he is here, I've reset the clock. It is now time for question period. The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's good rehearsal, though.

Our province is in trouble, and that's clear. You've taken Ontario to the edge of a precipice, and with your so-called budget, you took a giant step forward into the abyss. Now you're looking for a parachute.

The Ontario PC Party bailed you out on your teachers' legislation.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Peterborough, come to order.

Mr. Peter Shurman: We have a plan that will do what you can't: get Ontario on the path to recovery. We've been solid, and Ontarians know where we stand. The same cannot be said for you or your budget cohorts, the NDP—the left-leaning education Premier masquerading as a tough guy on labour, walking hand in hand with the far-left NDP masquerading as centrists. What a joke. Together, you have led us that much closer to a \$411-billion debt and a \$35-billion deficit.

How can Ontarians trust you now, and why aren't you getting on board with the PC plan to fix this mess?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is nothing if not entertaining, Speaker; I will say that. But I do appreciate the enthusiasm and the passion that he brings to his responsibilities. But they are at risk, I would argue, of allowing their rhetoric to distort their understanding of our reality.

I want to bring him back to some of the observations offered by Mr. Drummond in his report. He said in particular, in reference to Ontario and our government, "Spending is neither out of control nor wildly excessive. Ontario runs one of the lowest-cost provincial governments in Canada relative to its GDP.... And we must recognize that some important steps have been taken in the past few years."

If we're going to begin to debate this in earnest, we should do it on the basis of some reality. The fact of the matter is, we're in a fairly strong position. We've taken some positive steps. From there, let's have a debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaker, I love when the Premier quotes from the Drummond report. He uses it as he sees fit: He throws the stuff away he doesn't like and picks the stuff that he wants. You can't pick and choose. You've been pandering to unions for over eight years, Premier. With by-elections in mind, you decided to switch your tactics.

Ontarians have seen your chameleon games before: the pre-election no-new-taxes candidate turned new-health-tax Premier; the we-need-a-power-plant-in-Mississauga-and-Oakville Premier, to paying \$190 million to cancel the plants mid-election. Now, after eight years of bending over backwards for your union friends, you decided to pretend to get tough on labour.

The only thing Ontarians can be certain of is that with the NDP's help you will continue to decimate our province's finances.

Since you cannot seem to decide who or what you will be, once today's by-election votes are counted, will you commit to following the PC plan so that Ontario can finally recover?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, understanding the basis of our reality: We have one of the lowest-cost jurisdictions. In fact, we have the lowest spending per capita among all 10 provinces, and I think it's important to keep that in mind.

I think it would be important to pay some attention to a column written recently in the *Ottawa Citizen*, and the title of that column was "Tim Hudak's Simple Answer for Complicated Times." It states, "Hudak, in the pursuit of popularity"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Premier is answering.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: "Hudak, in the pursuit of popularity, not good governance, proposes draconian measures to cut Ontario's debt. That's just the thing that will drive the provincial economy into the toilet so that all the stimulus money spent to save an economy on the brink goes for naught."

That was less than two weeks ago. I think there's a tremendous amount of truth to be had in that, and I would caution my honourable colleague in terms of the kinds of proposals that they would put forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Eight years of photo ops, Premier, political tactics, incomprehensible spending habits, and you've taken Ontario to the brink. Like the song says, "Big wheel keeps on turning, proud Mary keeps on burning."

Instead of taking the opportunity to change your ways, you joined ranks with the NDP and produced a budget that in no way curbed your Liberal spendthrift ways. All the while, you ignored the Ontario PC Party's plan to get Ontario on track to recovery.

You need to put political opportunism aside. You need to listen and get on board with the PC Party plan. You

need to acknowledge that there is a range of options, beginning with an across-the-board wage freeze, arbitration reform, outsourcing, energy and many more on the way. Ontario PCs have been clear on where we stand. Why are you not listening?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate, again, the position taken by my honourable colleague, but obviously that's not something we can agree with.

I think it's important that we acknowledge our reality. We have the lowest-cost jurisdiction in the country. When it comes to spending in relation to GDP, we are the second lowest in the country. The fact of the matter is we've created 350,000 jobs since the recession; that's 90,000 more than we had originally lost. Our GDP, which is the size of our economy, has grown by some 2.6%, I believe, since the recession. We continue to grow.

We have in place now an important conversation. We've just brought our doctors back to the table. We intend to sit down with them and find a way forward by working together. We're working with our teachers as well; 55,000 of those came to the table, and we have plans for an agreement there.

We look forward to making more progress, and we're always open to some credible, workable ideas from my colleagues.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back again to the Premier: You told the public and members of this House weeks ago that we needed to pass your so-called Putting Students First Act immediately or there would be imminent labour disruption.

I have a message for the Premier. It's from my husband. This morning, he actually went to a school—our daughter's school—in Nepean, and he might be surprised to learn what my husband found: The school was open, there were teachers teaching, there were kids in the classroom, parents dropping off their kids. I must say, Speaker, this Premier hit the panic button harder than anybody did in Y2K.

While we're happy to bail out the Premier on a partial wage freeze, because the province cannot afford any more of the handsome salary increases or generous bonuses, it's hard not to question your motive. Will you finally admit that your recent conversion to fiscal conservatism has more to do with winning a seat in Kitchener–Waterloo—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

1040

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have before this Legislature a piece of legislation called the Putting Students First Act, because that's what we need to do: We need to put our students first. We need to give confirmation, and we needed to give confirmation, to

Ontario families that our government would do whatever it took to ensure that school would start and that the school year would be uninterrupted.

We're very, very pleased. I too, and the Premier too, have had an opportunity to go to many schools in this province in this past week. We know that schools are open, and we know that our teachers are accepting our students. But what we needed to ensure was that the dollars remained invested in our classrooms. The member opposite forgets about \$473 million that would be pulled from our classrooms if we did not take these steps. I know that's an issue to her, because that's why they're supporting this legislation. It's about putting our kids first, ensuring classes start and continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I find it interesting that they decided to go to schools when kids were on summer vacation and on the weekend before they started school. But the parents who went to school yesterday, the day before and today know full well that they hit the panic button.

To the Premier: You know the old saying. You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time. The voters in Kitchener–Waterloo aren't fools. They dropped their kids off to school this week too. Like my husband, they saw no lockouts, they saw no strikes, but they did see a Premier who would say anything and do anything to get elected. Some things never change. You'll go to any length in order to win. Will you apologize to the voters of Kitchener–Waterloo for using them in your ploy for getting that elusive majority you so desperately want tonight?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Perhaps the member opposite did not listen to my first answer. The Premier was at school on Tuesday; I was at schools on Wednesday. We know that parents were dropping their kids off, and we know that they were pleased with the choices that our government is making to keep dollars in the classrooms, to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten, to keep our class sizes small, to build new schools and make those additions so that our kids can have and continue to have the world-class education that our government has built up since 2003, when we came into office following the mess that that member opposite and her party had left to the families of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Simply put, no one believes you anymore. Premier, in what can only be considered a master stroke of alienation, you threw the teachers' unions under the proverbial bus after they secured you three back-to-back-to-back governments.

When it became clear that Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus actually had a plan to freeze wages, balance the books and get our debt and deficit under control, you stole our so-called homework and recalled the House early to make some cheap political points and take credit for our plan.

By tomorrow, win, lose or draw, you'll likely be working with our friends across the way, Bob Rae's successors, in the high-tax, high-spend, high-debt, high-deficit NDP to keep this province on its rocky path. Only the Ontario PCs and Tim Hudak have been consistent in our call for an across-the-board, legislated, broader public sector wage freeze. How can voters trust you now?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: On this side of the House, we know that families across this province find ways to live within their means. That's what they expect of our government, and that's why we're making choices that put our students first and ensure that we continue to roll out full-day kindergarten. I know that the member opposite's daughter is a graduate of full-day kindergarten.

This is an opportunity for all of our kids to get the education that we want for them, but as the adults, we need to make choices that put them first. What we are asking our partners in education is to ensure that we can put our kids first, that we can find ways to ensure that full-day kindergarten continues to roll out, so that my kids who benefitted from that, and the member opposite's kids who benefitted that, and all of our kids in this province can continue to get the education that they want and deserve. As the adults, we need to put them first.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. A few years ago, an MPP stood in this House and asked, "Premier, as your government lurches from crisis to crisis, crises of your own making, it has become clear that you are willing to say absolutely anything in order to hold on to power ... when you are prepared to say anything in order to hold on to power, why should Ontario families trust you?" Premier, who said that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It feels like I'm on a game show here. I look with some suspicion at my colleagues on this side of the House, Speaker, but I'm sure my honourable colleague opposite will enlighten us all with the source of that wonderful quote.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I am sure, Premier, that your memory fades when these matters come forward. In fact it was you, Premier, who asked that question, nearly a decade ago, in opposition.

Today he heads a government that's lurching from crisis to crisis, from the mess at Ornge to seat-saving private power deals that cost the public millions, and he heads a government that will say anything to hold on to power, even if it's unconstitutional legislation he knows will be thrown out by the courts.

My question to the Premier is the same one he asked a decade ago: Why should Ontario families trust you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: You know, my honourable colleague, together with the official opposition, has been trying to convince Ontario families that there's a crisis in education. We don't see it that way, Speaker. In fact, we see it more as, "Steady as she goes." Schools are open, as predicted; teachers are there, as predicted; students are

there, as predicted; parents continue to have confidence in their schools, as expected. And that has all happened because of the progress that we've made together during the course of the past nine years.

There has been steady progress. Test scores are up, graduation rates are up, and we have every reason in the world to continue to remain optimistic here in Ontario about the future of our education system for our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, just so that it's clear, this Premier is not saying "Steady as she goes" in Kitchener-Waterloo, let me tell you. He's telling families that schools are about to be closed.

The fact is, when Ontario families look at this government, they see a Premier who just doesn't know what he believes in anymore, besides holding on to power and avoiding accountability. Voters today will render a verdict on the Premier's desperate quest for majority power. Is he ready to stop the political games and focus on the challenges facing everyday families in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, we're consumed by that very responsibility every day. Understanding our financial circumstances, the state of the economy and our fiscal challenge, we think it's important for all of us to hit the pause button when it comes to public sector pay. So I'm proud to say that the doctors are back at the table with the Minister of Health. I think that's very good news. Anything that we do resolve together is always better than any kind of a unilateral decision.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to arrive at that outcome to the extent that we would have liked when it comes to working with our teachers, but we did land an agreement with 55,000, and using the basis of that agreement, we're expanding it province-wide.

So I think families understand, notwithstanding my honourable colleague's different perspective on this. They understand there's a fiscal challenge. We've got to hit the pause button on pay, and we've got to do it in a way that doesn't compromise the quality of health care and education.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Last October, we had an election, and the result of that was that a minority Parliament was elected to Ontario. The people of Ontario have spoken. They said that they want the parties to sit down and to do what's right when it comes to the people of Ontario.

Instead, for the last almost a year now, you've been contriving in order to get a by-election in Kitchener-Waterloo, to try to be able to organize in your own way, to your own political advantage, trying to get back to your majority. But there are issues that have to be dealt with. We've put forward a practical, simple proposal to stop handing out bonuses to the top earners in the public sector. Can we count on you this afternoon when it comes to that vote?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.
1050

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Premier has asked me to review the pay-for-performance policy that was established by the Conservative government of the day. We're doing that. I'll be bringing forward appropriate legislative and regulatory measures to ensure that everybody shares equally as we move back to balance, as we protect health care and education. I'll look forward to the member's comments on that and, hopefully, his and his party's support for that initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, to the Minister of Finance: We know that the Conservatives were wrong doing it 10 years ago. They should never have implemented that program. But what's even more galling, you've kept it in place for the last nine years, and only now that it's made public you decide that you're going to close the barn once the horse has bolted out of the barn.

I'm going to ask you again: We've put forward a very practical measure that essentially says we're going to stop the practice established by the Conservatives and carried out by the Liberals for nine years. Will you support the bill, yes or no?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Last week, the NDP tabled a bill. I pointed out to them that it only covered 30 people and they quickly moved to change the bill. It was written on the back of an envelope. We appreciate their direction, and we look forward to bringing forward a workable piece of legislation and regulation to ensure that everybody participates fairly.

I'll also remind the member opposite that their bill does not propose to cover those members of AMAPCEO who get pay for performance, or anyone bargain, and there are a substantial number of employees in that situation.

We need to have a fair bill, Mr. Speaker, a bill that covers more than 30 of 9,000 people. We'll bring that forward in a responsible fashion. We'll look forward to the views of the third party on that. I appreciate they're moving this issue forward. Hopefully, they'll be able to see their way to vote for the bill—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the Minister of Finance: It seems to me that you're embracing the Tory policy. You're trying to find some way to be able to keep employees—a bad policy, instituted by the Conservatives, that had pay-for-performance bonuses as part of the salary. You have to make a choice: You either agree with the concept or you don't. You can't keep on playing this game of saying one thing to the voters of Kitchener-Waterloo and Vaughan and doing another thing when you come here to the Legislature.

I'm going to ask you again: Will you scrap the Conservative pay-for-bonus scheme that was put in place 10 years ago and vote with New Democrats to get rid of this?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we're going to fix it, and we're going to fix it appropriately, in a fair and responsible way.

We need to push the pause button on all these matters so that we can continue to invest in full-day learning, which the Conservatives would cancel. We need to do it in order to continue to make the important investments in health care that are helping our families. We've got shorter wait lists for various surgical procedures, more people have a family doctor—so yes, we are going to do that.

I hope the member opposite and the third party will support that initiative. We agree it was bad policy set up by a bad government in the bad old days, so with the steps we'll take, we'll ensure fairness across the public and broader public sectors, across bargain and non-bargain employees, in a way that will survive constitutional and court challenges.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy. It's no surprise that the \$190-million cancellation of the Mississauga power plant has shocked every taxpayer in Ontario, but yesterday at the public accounts committee, Liberals delayed and then stopped our efforts to get to the truth about the cancelled Oakville power plant. Minister, your friends did everything they could to stop the Auditor General from investigating Oakville, and you were successful. The clock ran out. That leads me to my question, Minister: What do you not want the public to learn about Oakville, and just how big is this bill going to be?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, we've been clear from the beginning that the relocation of the Mississauga power plant would be spoken to when we had a relocation and we had cost estimates, and it was. We put the documents out there.

We still haven't seen the Conservative cost estimate from their commitment to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. I'm waiting to see that, to see how it compares, because it was their position as well as it was the NDP's. And we've been very clear about Oakville. When the very sensitive negotiations, arbitration process is concluded—when it reaches a conclusion, we'll speak to the conclusion. At that time, everybody will be able to judge the results. There isn't a result at the moment to judge, but there are sensitive negotiations and discussions ongoing.

That's been our position, and the Speaker has an issue before you at the moment. We'll await that ruling.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, we both know there's more to the \$190 million you paid out to cancel Mississauga. In addition, you gave them a sole-sourced, brand new \$300-million gas plant contract in Lambton, and you did this instead of simply converting the coal plant.

Taxpayers now have no way of knowing whether that \$300 million is a fair price, or whether an additional part of the cancellation fee was buried in that \$300 million.

At estimates committee a couple of weeks ago, your finance minister said—and a former energy minister, I may add—that this was done because, and I quote, “You can’t convert a coal plant to gas.” Now, when I toured the Lambton plant, the first thing the executives told me was how easy it was to convert a coal plant to gas. My question: Minister, are you sticking with his story?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I think the member, with respect, has mixed up several things. Our commitment was not to proceed with the Mississauga gas plant, as was theirs, and to relocate it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What we’ve done is, we’re relocating it. So this other gas plant that the member is speaking about in fact is the gas plant that was to go in Mississauga. But, you know, yesterday was an interesting day—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce—Grey, come to order.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: —the federal government came out with their own coal emissions targets. We take a different position than they do. We’re getting out of coal by the end of 2014, no later. We’re cleaning up the air, absolutely. My friend talks about the Lambton generating station. It’s time it was closed. The health of Ontarians demands that we get out of coal and clean up the air.

HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Sarnia residents and Mayor Bradley have been ringing alarm bells about the \$8-million to \$10-million deficit faced by their local CCAC due to increased demand and costs but no increase to funding.

The CCAC has requested a funding increase from the LHIN, but the LHIN can’t say, as funding hasn’t been finalized by the minister. Mayor Bradley said that seniors understand that they probably are going to lose a service that is very valuable to them. When will the minister finalize LHINs’ funding for the year so that seniors can no longer, and don’t have to, worry?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite. I wonder if she has had a chance to read the London Free Press article just this morning that talks about the extraordinary progress that is being made by investing more in community care. In fact, we’ve seen the ALC rates in the hospitals come down substantially because more people are getting the care they need at home. This is the absolute founding principle of our action plan: get people the care they need in the right place. Very often, the right place is at home. Too many people are still in hospital who could be cared for at

home. Too many people are in long-term care who could be cared for at home. That is why we, in this past budget, made the decision to invest more in home care while we hold the compensation of physicians constant and while we hold hospital base budgets constant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I did read the article in the London Free Press today, but today we’re here asking a question about the Sarnia, St. Clair location. So back to the minister: This minister can talk a good game about strengthening the community care sector, but when she fails to provide timely and clear information about funding five months into the fiscal year, her commitment to this sector has to be called into question.

I’m going to ask the minister again: Please, when will her office provide finalized funding to the Erie St. Clair LHIN and all the LHINs in Ontario so that more home care in Sarnia—not London, in Sarnia—and all communities are protected?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what is happening in London, and the results of that are evident in the article, is happening right across the province. We have put a very clear priority on enhancing home care. It’s what people want. People want to be home whenever possible, and it’s also what’s right for the system. We have made some tough decisions on other parts of our budget so we can free up money for more home care. That is the future of health care in this province, and I am very excited that we’re actually starting to see the results of that on the ground.

EDUCATION

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question this morning is for the Minister of Education. As the economy recovers from the global recession, we all know we’ve had to make some tough choices. The government simply can’t afford the kind of salary increases we’ve seen in the past, and I think many people recognize that. But as the economy continues to recover, the government has to take serious steps to bring the budget back into balance. Will the minister please tell this House how the McGuinty government has protected education in Ontario in the face of these choices for the sake of our students’ futures?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank my colleague for the question. Let me be very clear: The commitment of this government to strong publicly funded education, Mr. Speaker—that will never waver. It’s a commitment coupled with the dedication of our partners in education that together has brought us real results—real results for our students, results that we should all be proud of. We’ve brought test scores up. We’ve brought grad rates up. We’ve restored public confidence in publicly funded education after years of neglect under the previous PC government. Our work in education has brought us recognition here in Canada and around the world as a leader in educational excellence. That’s why we’re work-

ing so hard to protect the classroom experience for Ontario students, because we know that the best investment in the future of this province is an investment in our kids, and that's why those are our priority choices.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My supplementary question is also for the Minister of Education. It's about full-day kindergarten, which is very important to the constituents in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, and I would say everyone's riding.

Parents know that kids are getting a world-class education, and they're also saving thousands of dollars with the introduction of full-day kindergarten. We've talked a lot about the Drummond report in the House this week. The Drummond report said we should eliminate full-day kindergarten. The Drummond report also said we should raise class sizes. The opposition parties said that we should do that.

Can the minister please tell this House why the government has made the choices that it has made?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member is right. We have sought out advice across this province and we have received advice. We received advice from Mr. Drummond in the Drummond report, and it did recommend, to live within our fiscal reality, to increase class sizes and halt the rollout of full-day kindergarten. But we know how important these initiatives are to our students, to the children of this province, and we have chosen to keep class sizes small, to continue to roll out full-day kindergarten. As a result of those choices, we are keeping teachers in our classrooms and educational workers in our schools. By choosing to protect full-day kindergarten, we are preserving 3,800 teaching positions. By rejecting Mr. Drummond's advice to increase class sizes, we are preserving more than 6,000 teaching positions.

Mr. Drummond recommended cutting 70% of non-teaching staff positions. That would have put 10,000 dedicated educational workers out on the street, and those are not the choices that we want to make.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. John Yakabuski: Now back to question period.

To the Premier: Premier, it seems that day after day, scandal after scandal, and your government is exposed. First we had eHealth, then Ornge, then the Mississauga power plant scandal and countless others.

We now have another scandal that is brewing under your watch. In addition to ballooning salaries, the OSPCA spent \$4.6 million in 2010 in so-called professional and consulting fees. In an internal memo dated August 13, 2012, it appears they want to keep those numbers secret.

Premier, will you not learn from previous scandals and require the OSPCA to release the salaries of their employees, and will you provide the necessary oversight to avert another Ornge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to speak about the OSPCA here this morning. First of all, let me congratulate the OSPCA for the good work they have done.

To answer the question of the member from Pembroke, the salaries of the OSPCA are on the sunshine list, so you don't need to ask for more information about them. All of those that you are just—your innuendo this morning that they are hiding their salaries—it's on the sunshine list.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Only the salaries of the CAO, the CEO and the CFO are revealed.

First we had the ridiculous \$1.6-million salary of Dr. Mazza that blew up in your face, Premier. Now we have a charitable organization, that receives provincial funds, taking a page from the Ornge book.

In an internal email sent to OSPCA CEO Kate MacDonald from CFO Tom Stephenson, he said, "Please note, the file as it stands has some salary numbers in it that we would not want to get out." It goes on to list some other costs. Premier, what could a charitable agency receiving provincial funding have to hide?

One thing that has remained constant in these files is the lack of oversight from your Liberal government, allowing these kinds of things to take place. Premier, will you finally do the right thing, provide the necessary oversight, protect taxpayers' dollars and release the salaries and the details of consulting contracts at the OSPCA?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, every dollar that is invested in OSPCA by this government—and we're not going to apologize today for investing in OSPCA for the welfare of the animals in Ontario. Every dollar that is being invested by this government into the OSPCA is accounted for. We on this side of the House believe in transparency, so—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sorry; I asked a question—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, you did. I'm awfully glad that you recognize that, too. So let's bring it down.

Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Talking about transparency, we have asked the PC Party to release their expenses a year ago, and they have not yet released it. So what are you hiding? I'm going to ask the member from Pembroke.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Premier. Recently, your government made it clear that MNR cuts are coming. Communities across the north, such as Ignace, have serious concerns that these cuts could mean the closure of local MNR offices and, with them, the loss of a significant number of the community's jobs.

Given that recent cuts, such as the downsizing of the Bear Wise program, took Ontarians by surprise, including the local police organizations who were suddenly tasked with these new duties, will the Premier commit today to full public disclosure and consultation before these cuts are made?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: It's a very, very important question. As usual, this government will ensure that we do the necessary consultation, as we have in the past. It is very, very important that, as we move forward, everyone clearly understands the decisions we're making, why we're making them, and fully engages in those types of decision-making initiatives that will ensure, as we all know, that the importance of the MNR remains intact and is very, very respected by this government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: We've seen what consultation means with this government. It's usually after the cuts have happened.

1110

Back to the Premier: We all understand the need to tighten our belts, given our current financial situation, but cuts to offices in Ignace and other communities today will have serious economic impacts tomorrow. For example, community leaders are now worried that these cuts will have a negative impact on the reopening of the Ignace sawmill and the Bending Lake iron ore mine because of the local expertise that it takes away.

So I ask again: Will the Premier commit to holding off on cuts until municipalities, First Nations and members of the public can have meaningful input?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There's no doubt, as the member knows and as everyone in this House knows, that there are tough decisions we've had to make. There's absolutely no question. We will ensure that the negative impact is minimized as we move forward. One thing we won't do is compromise the principles that MNR has always had.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation. There has been a lot of news recently surrounding the contract negotiations between the Canadian Auto Workers and the three major North American auto companies. I know that the auto sector is really important to my constituents, many of whom work in the sector, and I also know it's important to the overall vitality of Ontario's economy.

It's important that we continue to create and retain jobs across the province, and we need to ensure we're supporting key sectors like auto. These are very competitive times, and the recent economic downturn has hit the auto sector particularly hard. This impacts Ontario's families, and it impacts the province's economic well-being.

Could minister please let the House know what Ontario is doing to ensure the strength of this sector?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question. But more importantly, I want to thank him as a passionate advocate for the auto sector. This member has worked tirelessly as chair of our auto caucus on the government side, and he's done some great work.

The auto sector does represent, as the member said, a very important part of our economy and contributes billions of dollars to our GDP. More importantly, it employs over 485,000 Ontarians.

We're very pleased to see the auto sector recovering well, following the restructuring in 2009, with growth in sales every year since 2010. In fact, Ontario has been the number one auto assembly jurisdiction in North America since 2004. That's why this government has made a number of strategic investments in the auto sector, including the restructuring of GM and Chrysler and recent investments in Toyota and Magna.

We will continue to stand by the auto sector. We'll continue to make those investments that are creating jobs in this province, even if the opposition did not support those investments—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I know that my constituents, and I think all Ontarians, will be pleased that this government recognizes how important the auto sector is to the overall economic health of this province. Auto workers in Oakville and across the province can see that strong commitments being put forward by this government will ensure that Ontario continues to lead the way in the auto industry.

Over the summer I was talking with constituents, and while the overall feeling is that the auto sector is doing well, they're now reading articles about the Canadian Auto Workers negotiations and they're concerned about where the industry is heading.

We all know that Ontario's auto sector has fared better than many other jurisdictions across North America. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation, could he update us on what has been happening over the summer in the auto industry in this province?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The fact is—there's no two ways about it—this has been a very good summer for the auto sector in Ontario. We just look at the investment General Motors announced recently: \$850 million in research and development in that sector; very important. This investment will bring tangible benefits to automotive suppliers but also to our post-secondary institutions.

I'm also pleased to note that this summer a third production line was introduced at the Ford plant in Essex, Ontario. That's very important to those workers out there. Announcements like these would not have been possible had we taken the opposition's advice and not stood by the auto sector during their most challenging times.

The member talked about the auto negotiations, and that's an important point too. These negotiations are important. We call on all sides to do the very best they can to come up with agreements that are fair to workers but also maintain our competitiveness in the province of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. No matter how you spin it, Premier, your record is one of wasted taxpayers' dollars, mismanagement and scandal: Ornge, eHealth, Samsung, your power plants—and the list goes on and on. The result of nine years under the McGuinty government has left Ontarians burdened with record debt, record deficits, record high hydro rates and growing unemployment lines.

Today, voters in Kitchener–Waterloo face an important choice, and I believe they'll choose the path by denying you the majority that would only accelerate Ontario down the road to nowhere. Isn't it time you woke up and realized the message voters gave you last October hasn't changed, and that they won't trust you with a majority?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm going to react to all that negativity with some positivity. We have had a wonderful exercise in democracy during the past four weeks. I want to thank all the parties, all the candidates, all the volunteers, all the teams who have been making the efforts that they have put into this exercise.

There are other parts of this world where people are making sacrifices, even sacrificing their lives, so they might have in place a democracy where they can make a choice about their future, and I think we should celebrate that today in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, more spin, Premier, more spin. Let's face it: Your record is so bad that you had to base your entire campaign in Kitchener–Waterloo on our plan to freeze public sector wages. Now desperate for a majority and knowing you definitely couldn't run on your own record, you stole our plan and tried to call it your own. But you didn't even get that right, because you won't freeze wages across the board. Instead, you created an unnecessary crisis as the school year was about to start—more bungling and mismanagement.

Premier, do you really think anyone believes the guy who gladly opened the vault for these unions in the first place will actually follow through on his promise to keep it locked if you get a majority?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It takes a lot of work to be that bleak, a lot of work.

Let's celebrate something else. We've been talking a lot about education, and I know that we're all political geeks to some extent or another, and we've been paying some attention to some of the ongoings south of the border and how they lament, in both parties down there, the quality of their schools. I think we can and should celebrate the progress we continue to make inside On-

tario schools. We can be proud of the progress that we've made, proud of the effort made by our teachers, proud of the relationship that we've worked so hard to establish with our teachers.

But any way you look at it, class sizes are down, test scores are up, graduation rates are up, and there's a sense of enthusiasm around the possibility inside Ontario's publicly funded schools. That's all there, and again, that's something we can and should celebrate in Ontario.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, ConCreate USL went bankrupt in the middle of its work renovating overpasses on the Stoney Creek portion of the QEW. I understand the ministry has just chosen a new contractor for the projects, but nevertheless, the ongoing closure of the Millen Road overpass is causing enormous inconvenience for the residents in this area.

The ministry clearly failed in its financial due diligence on ConCreate USL. When can residents finally expect the work to be done and life to return to normal in the surrounding areas? And how much is this going to cost the taxpayers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question. First of all, you should be aware that the procurement process at MTO, and indeed at Infrastructure Ontario, has been recognized internationally as among the best in the world, and we have demonstrated that in all of our significant infrastructure as we move forward.

In terms of the specific project that you're mentioning, I will take it as a request on your part that I look into any inconvenience that might be caused to the people in and around Hamilton as a result of the readjusting of that particular project.

I know that there have been a number of projects as a result of that particular bankruptcy, including one in the city of Ottawa that I'm more familiar with, and we have taken great care to find new subcontractors and to minimize the impact on the community.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Minister. You might want to do a little more investigation into the solvency of these companies that you're hiring to do the work.

The company had a \$17.5-million contract with your ministry—\$17.5 million—to renovate six bridges along the QEW, including Millen Road, Grays Road, Fifty Road, Fruitland Road and Glover Road. Now, in addition to massive inconveniences, there are some genuinely dangerous areas, such as the Fifty Road overpass where sightlines are severely compromised. Severe accidents are possible.

When will the ministry finally complete the long-delayed work on these QEW improvements?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: First of all, I have to reiterate that if the member looks at all of these significant contracts that have been let by MTO across the province

of Ontario, bankruptcies are seldom seen. This is a one-off. It's the first one that I've seen since I've been minister, the first one I've seen since I've been back in this House.

Once again, you've brought to my attention what you perceive and what your constituents feel are some inconveniences as a result of the resetting of that particular contract. I'll take that as a request and look into it, and I will get back to you with a response. Over and above that, I'd be very happy to arrange a meeting with you and senior officials at MTO so we can review it.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Some of the constituents in my riding have turned to Ontario's social assistance system during the recent global recession. As the economy recovered and people worked towards getting back on their feet, the Ontario Works program was there to provide much more than just income support. Ontarians also turned to the Ontario Works program for help finding a job and for employment training supports. I understand that the program is a lot different than it was when we took office in 2003. Can the minister please tell the members of this House and my constituents what improvements our government has made since 2003?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the question from the honourable member. Particularly during these tough—what we've seen in the last few years—economic times, it's very important that we have a social assistance system that's responding to the needs of Ontarians during this worldwide recession.

Since 2003, we have made a number of very comprehensive changes to social assistance. We have raised social assistance rates eight years in a row, by a total of 14.9%. We ended the deduction of the national child benefit supplement and flowed through the federal working income tax benefit to all Ontarians receiving social assistance. We've simplified rules around earnings exemptions, so that the more you work, the more money you keep. We've extended drug, dental and vision care benefits for people leaving social assistance for employment, to help them make the transition.

Mr. Speaker, it's always a work in progress, and I look forward, in the supplementary, to talking about further reforms that we're looking at.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Minister. It's good to hear that the system is there for those who need it.

Despite the progress the minister mentioned, I've heard from my constituents that there are ways that the system could work better for our clients. I've also been hearing some concerns about its long-term sustainability.

I understand that the ministry appointed a commission for the review of social assistance in 2010 and that the commission was mandated to provide advice on ways to not only reform the system but also to ensure the long-

term viability of the social assistance system. Can the minister elaborate on this for us?

Hon. John Milloy: We recognize that our social assistance system needs to be more responsive to the needs of those who are receiving social assistance, particularly when it comes to helping them and encouraging them in the transition into employment.

As the member noted in his question, in November 2010 we named two commissioners, the Honourable Frances Lankin, a former MPP and cabinet minister, along with Dr. Munir Sheikh, academic and former chief statistician of Canada, to look at our social assistance system. The commissioners have received almost 700 written submissions, and their website has received over 47,000 visits. They've had a consultation process that has brought them to 11 communities. They've met with numerous stakeholder groups and engaged with over 2,000 individuals. Mr. Speaker, I know I speak on behalf of the government when I say that we are looking forward to receiving their report very soon and the advice that they're going to provide us.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, just this spring your Liberal House leader stood before the Greater Kitchener–Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, making excuses why your government couldn't invest in upgrading Highway 7. He claimed the Liberals shelved the Highway 7 expansion in 2010 because they simply didn't have the money to invest in this critical infrastructure project. But let's take a look at what the Liberal government decided to spend taxpayers' money on instead. How about \$750 million on the mess at Ornge, \$2 billion on eHealth, \$190 million on buying Liberal seats in Mississauga and possibly now up to \$1 billion on cancelling the Oakville power plant?

Premier, how can anyone in Kitchener–Waterloo seriously believe you'll actually follow through on building Highway 7 two years after you broke your original promise on this project when you continue to waste billions of dollars on Liberal pet projects and seat-saver programs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'm really pleased that he raised the question with respect to Highway 7. What we've done so far: We've protected the 18-kilometre route so that it cannot be used for anything other than building Highway 7. We have committed \$50 million to acquire properties for the new corridor. The property acquisition effort is already under way. That funding was allocated before we knew there would be a by-election, and that government voted against it. The Tories voted against \$50 million for Highway 7. Take that back to your by-election right now. We've entered into a number of agreements with local businesses and property owners, and are continuing to work closely with those impacted by the corridor. We've acquired a maintenance facility

and land on Shirley Avenue in Kitchener, where we will begin stockpiling fill for the Highway 7 construction. We have identified the Highway 7 project as a good candidate for Infrastructure Ontario, and we have been working with P3 Canada to provide some assistance with the funding. That's what we have to say about Highway 7.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier. Premier, you promised to build Highway 7 in 2007, cancelled it in 2010, and now you've said the project is back on. Yes, there's a by-election happening.

Premier, if I promised my wife I'm going to fix the sink and did nothing for five years, I would imagine somewhere around the three-year mark she would start to get awfully suspicious about that sink ever getting fixed. Nobody in Kitchener-Waterloo believes you'll actually follow through on this project. And you just don't have to take my word for it. In fact, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record recently said, "What we think the public will find unacceptable is that \$190 million in public funds that could have been spent in the public interest was used instead to keep this self-serving, power-hungry party in office."

So I have to ask you, Premier, why should anyone in Kitchener-Waterloo believe you'll build Highway 7?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I can only repeat the facts. I can only repeat the facts that I just repeated. I would add one other factor: It's \$300 million which is going to the Waterloo LRT project. But I do have a Conservative record, a PC record, on Highway 7: 1997, no plan; 1998, no plan; 1999, no plan; 2000, no plan; 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007—all the way through from this government, no plan for Highway 7. We're putting money into it. We've got a deadline when we're going to break ground. You take that back and talk to the people in Kitchener-Waterloo.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would actually seek your attention. I would like to remind the member from Peterborough that I've already singled him out in the name of his riding—

Interjection: Kick him out.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —along with the member from Renfrew.

I usually take this opportunity, when somebody asks me to toss somebody, to tell them that they may be the first.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was your first.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We are so close. Thank you.

New question.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A question to the Minister of Education: Parents continue to see their local child care

centres shut their doors. Twenty-four centres have closed in Toronto alone in this past year.

In April, the government agreed, under pressure from the NDP, to provide \$90 million to help keep child care centres open. Why are child care centres still waiting for this money, and why is the government threatening to claw back all the money that's not spent by December 31?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very proud of our government's record when it comes to child care. Since 2003, child care funding has increased from \$532 million to more than \$1 billion—a 90% increase. We stepped in with an investment of \$63.5 million to permanently fill the funding gap when the federal government stepped away. We are providing an additional \$51 million in funding to child care centres, phased in over the next few years. We're also providing \$12 million over five years to help non-profit child care centres renovate.

In this year's budget, we invested more than \$90 million in 2012, \$68 million in 2013 and \$84 million in 2014.

We are working right now with the sector in a big conversation to find a pathway to transition, to modernize the child care system in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: All those claims are no comfort to children and parents facing the closure of their centres.

Minister, the government knew a year ago that it would take municipalities some time to get provincial dollars to child care centres, but the government took its time, and now municipalities are being threatened with losing dollars that aren't spent by December 31.

When will the minister stop these threats, stop putting more child care centres at risk of closure, and promise that every dollar of the \$90 million she just talked about, the \$90-million transition funding, will be spent to help child care centres stay open?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Full-day kindergarten is the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation, and we need to find a way for full-day kindergarten to live compatibly with a modern child care setting.

We have seen investments in the city of Toronto go up by 50%. We will continue to work with our partner municipalities. We will continue to support Ontario families to give their kids the best early learning that we can in this province, and we are recognized around the world for doing that.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know how important it is to Ontarians that our government do everything it can to make life easier for seniors. Seniors are among the most vulnerable residents of Ontario, and it's particularly important that we provide care to our seniors in a manner that is accessible and as close to home as possible. Can you please explain to the House what this government is

doing to ensure that seniors are getting the care they need where they need it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for the question. I'm very proud to talk about how we're making care for seniors a priority in our Ontario health care system.

We're developing a seniors' care strategy which will help older Ontarians stay healthy, live at home longer and get the care they need—the right care at the right time at the right place.

Dr. Samir Sinha is our expert lead in our seniors' care strategy. He's travelling the province. He's asking all Ontarians, but particularly older Ontarians and their caregivers and their providers, for their input on the seniors' care strategy. We will all work together to make sure that our seniors get all the care they need and all the independence that they want.

DEFERRED VOTES

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE ACT (EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR LES AIDANTS NATURELS (MODIFICATION DES NORMES D'EMPLOI)

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1140.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Jeffrey has moved second reading of Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave.

All those in favour, rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berdinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Campbell, Sarah
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Clark, Steve
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczak, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah

Milligan, Rob E.
Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Piruzza, Teresa
Qadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter

Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Elliot, Christine
Fedeli, Victor

McDonell, Jim
McGuinty, Dalton
McKenna, Jane
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul

Takhar, Harinder S.
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Wong, Soo
Yakubski, John
Yurek, Jeff
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed will stand one at a time and—I guess that's kind of redundant, isn't it? All those opposed, stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 72; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Speaker, I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Pickering—Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to make a very minor correction to my record. In my earlier question to the Minister of Education, I made reference to the opposition party. I meant to say the PC Party. Thank you.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we leave, I'd like to make two comments. The first comment is a compliment. I want to thank everyone for remembering what I asked yesterday, and that is to keep all your comments based on thoughts and ideas as opposed to individuals. I appreciate that today.

The second thing I'd like to mention to you is a reminder that we do not mention individual names in the House and that you cannot do that even at the side way by reading something. I'm asking you to make sure that you continue to refer to each other as either your title or your riding. It helps elevate, instead of go down. Thank you very much.

This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.
The House recessed from 1144 to 1300.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we have unanimous consent to wear the green ribbon for organ and tissue donation, if that's all right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West has requested unanimous consent to wear the green ribbon. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Coteau: Today, I'd like to welcome to our Legislature Sharron Richards, who's chair of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder ONE; Gal Koren, who's from Motherisk Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Clinic at the Hospital for Sick Children and runs an initiative in her riding of Don Valley East; and Linda Waybrant, who's a constituent of mine and a strong advocate for FASD.

I'd like to welcome them all to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is my understanding that the ribbons will be made available for all members shortly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NORTH BUXTON HOMECOMING

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my great pleasure to rise today to recognize a courageous chapter in Canadian history. In Chatham-Kent-Essex, there's a small settlement called North Buxton. North Buxton was founded in 1849 as a refuge for escaped slaves from the United States who were making their way through the Underground Railroad.

At a time when one of the worst human tragedies was occurring just south of the border, many brave Canadians risked their lives to bring African slaves to freedom. Existing as the last stop along the Underground Railroad, many of these slaves settled in North Buxton. Today, many of the residents of North Buxton are descendants from those emancipated slaves.

Just this past Labour Day weekend, the people of North Buxton celebrated their 89th annual homecoming. Organized by the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum, this international homecoming draws former and current North Buxton residents together for a weekend to celebrate their shared heritage and to commemorate the sacrifices their descendants made.

Fun for all families, ranging from barbecues; a grand parade, church services; a "family feud," a slo-pitch tournament done without the feuding; midway rides and just good old catching up with family and friends.

I would like to recognize Shannon Prince, the curator of the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum, her husband Bryan and their committee for all their hard work in keeping the memory of this important chapter of Canadian history alive.

Oh, and by the way, Shannon and Bryan Prince were recognized by Conservative MP Dave Van Kesteren through the awarding of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Award for their continued hard work and dedication to the community they so love.

I'd like to congratulate the people of North Buxton on their 89th annual homecoming and wish them success in continuing the legacy of their descendants for many years to come.

ARGYLE ART IN THE PARK

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I am so pleased to share with the members of this Legislature the wonderful details of an event which took place in the London-Fanshawe riding on August 25.

Rev. Paul Browning, Rodney Perkins, Tosha Densky and Nancy McSloy went to great lengths to coordinate the first annual Argyle Art in the Park for the Argyle community, local businesses, performers and artists.

Local artists and food vendors were able to set up displays at no cost to themselves to showcase their original works of art and tasty food with the community. In total, there were 35 artists, 12 performers and five local food vendors. Artists and performers as young as 13 years old were showing off their amazing talents.

The event started in the morning and went right through the evening where a movie was played in the park and families were able to pull out their blankets, sit on their lawn chairs and share some family time together.

Mr. Speaker, the goal that day was to bring the community together to appreciate talented artists, cooks and performers in London-Fanshawe, and I have to say we certainly were successful. There was a lot of fun, smiles and laughter all day.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Mr. Michael Coteau: Each year, on September 9 at 9:09 a.m., countries around the world pause to remember the millions who will never be able to achieve their full potential because of prenatal alcohol exposure.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD, is a term used to describe the physical, intellectual, behavioural and learning impairments that can occur to individuals whose mothers consume alcohol during pregnancy. Health Canada describes FASD as the most common developmental disability, occurring in about one in 100 births.

Each year approximately 3,000 babies in Canada are born with this entirely preventable disorder, and in Ontario, it's estimated that more than 130,000 children and adults currently live with this lifelong disability. Some who struggle with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder don't get the appropriate support, often drop out of school, have learning disabilities and poor problem-solving skills, have difficulty finding jobs and are more prone to infractions with the criminal justice system. FASD cannot be cured, but it's entirely preventable. FASD has long impacts on individuals suffering from the disorder.

Studies have shown that people who have this condition end up costing loved ones and the system over \$1.3 million in costs throughout their lifetime. We must

do more in this province to work with people with FASD and also support those who work with people who suffer from the condition.

ISAAC BOUCKLEY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: The Paralympic Games are the second-largest international multi-sport event in the world. This summer, 66 countries will compete in the swimming events at the Paralympic Games in London. This fact makes it the most competitive Paralympic Games in history.

It is my pleasure to rise today and tell everyone about an exceptional young man from the great riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. Mr. Isaac Bouckley is an 18-year-old resident of Port Hope who is a member of the Northumberland Aquatic Club and swims at the Jack Burger Sports Complex in Port Hope.

Mr. Bouckley is spending the end of his summer representing Canada in swimming at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London. Mr. Bouckley had an exceptional year in 2011, winning three individual gold medals at the Central Ontario Secondary School Athletics championships. His impressive swimming performances throughout the year earned him the prestigious recognition of Para-Swimmer of the Year by Swim Ontario.

The rigorous selection process for Paralympic Canadian swimmers was based on the performances at the 2012 Paralympic trials held last March in Montreal. During the trials, Bouckley set a personal best in all of his events and won a silver medal in the 200-metre individual medley and bronze medals in the 100-metre breaststroke and 100-metre freestyle with his exceptional performance results.

I want to congratulate Isaac and wish him all the very best in his return home.

FALL FAIRS

Mr. John Vanthof: Fall is an important time of year for many of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane. Gardeners are bringing in the last of their produce and farmers are harvesting the crops, but everyone pauses for a day or an evening to go to the fall fair and have some fun. There are several fall fairs in the riding: Cochrane, Charlton, Matheson, Englehart, Porquis and New Liskeard.

Many of our fairs have reached or are about to reach their 100th anniversary. This coincides with the opening up of our region for agriculture and the discovery of its vast mineral deposits and forests. The fall fair played an important part in the culture of those early communities.

A lot has changed in 100 years. Mining booms have come and gone and have come back. The once mighty forestry sector, while still a vital part of the north, is a shadow of its glory days. The influx of pioneers who travelled on a newly built ONR railway to farm in the Clay Belt has come and gone as well.

Some of their descendants have prospered and built large operations, while other early farms have grown back into brush, but the boom is back in the agricultural areas of the north: new varieties of crops, new technologies and people coming from other areas to invest in the Clay Belt.

Despite the changes, one of the constants has been the local fall fair. Yes, there have been lean years, but the fairs have survived and are flourishing.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the agriculture societies and fall fair boards. Ask anyone who has volunteered on such a committee. It's a lot of work, a lot more than meets the eye: organizing the exhibits and finding judges for the livestock classes or an auctioneer for the cake sale. It all takes time and effort. In New Liskeard, they even have to find sponsors for the car draw.

Fall fairs are an important part of our rural culture, so get some candy floss, enjoy the harvest queen pageant, and be proud to be from a farming town in rural Ontario.

1310

ELECTRONIC WASTE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise today to extend my congratulations to the city of Peterborough on its recent recognition by the Ontario Electronic Stewardship, or OES, not only as the only municipality to make the top 10 list of municipalities for total metric tonnes of electronic waste collected, but the city also topped the list of municipalities when it comes to kilograms of electronic waste per household that were diverted from landfill.

From April 2009 to December 2011, residents of the city of Peterborough diverted 32.82 kilograms per household, a total of 1,117.38 tonnes of electronics, from our landfill on Bensford Road.

Peterborough residents have played a major role in helping the OES collect more than 100,000 tonnes of electronics—more than 16 pounds of e-waste per person in Ontario—in just three years. To put this number in context, imagine 12,222 tractor-trailer loads of unwanted electronics parked end to end from downtown Toronto all the way to Kingston, Ontario.

While hitting this milestone is great news, we still have more work to do. This is why OES is asking all Ontarians to be part of the next 100,000-tonne pledge, a movement to encourage everyone to reuse or recycle their unwanted electronics. I encourage all of my colleagues in this House to visit www.recycleyourelectronics.ca and commit to reduce their e-waste. More than 4,200 Ontarians have already made this pledge.

Mr. Speaker, this is very important for our environment. I ask everybody to get on board.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: Recently in this House there has been significant discussion about improving conditions for Ontario's seniors.

In my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, I am pleased to say that in the last year, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare was able to treat a grand total of 952 cataract cases. Sadly, it appears that Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare will not be given the opportunity to improve on these numbers. I say this because Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has, to date, received approval to perform surgeries for only 409 cataract cases in 2012–13.

Apparently, the McGuinty government made the decision to decrease the provincial allocation of cataract surgeries by 10% across the province. Yet somehow, this has translated into a 50% reduction in Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I should point out that the decrease in allocation is not in response to lower demand for cataract procedures. In fact, I have received a number of letters from my constituents who have had their surgery cancelled or postponed and are concerned that they will not be able to receive cataract treatment in the upcoming year.

Rural seniors are already forced to travel significant distances to receive care. Reductions in the number of procedures available to patients in a given year will only place a further strain on these individuals in need.

I call on the McGuinty government to treat the residents of Parry Sound–Muskoka fairly. Provide the necessary allocation of cataract surgeries so our residents get the treatment they need in a timely manner.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I rise in the House today to address Overdose Awareness Day. August 31 marked Overdose Awareness Day, which commemorates those who have met with death or permanent injury as a result of drug overdose, and also acknowledges the grief felt by their families and friends.

The abuse of prescription narcotics or painkillers has emerged as a public safety issue around the world. These drugs are being over-prescribed; they are being misused.

This is an issue that the Ontario government is taking concrete steps to tackle. We made a commitment, as part of our narcotics strategy, to develop a narcotics database that would capture all prescription information for these drugs dispensed in Ontario, and we are fulfilling that commitment.

We now have a narcotics monitoring system that has started tracking prescription narcotics and other controlled substances dispensed in Ontario. This new system will save lives.

To support our patients and medical professionals, we're providing more education about the appropriate prescribing, dispensation and use of narcotics. This database will help us monitor the use of drugs like OxyContin and now OxyNEO.

The abuse of prescription narcotics is a crisis that we will not accept. Our overall strategy addresses misuse of prescription narcotics and ensures their safe and appropriate use by patients with medical needs and the professionals who prescribe them.

KEES TIEKSTRA

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a privilege today to recognize a man whose 40-year commitment to families struggling with muscular dystrophy has set a standard of active citizenship we should all aspire to achieve.

Over the weekend, Kees Tiekstra, an 84-year-old retired Athens firefighter, completed his 17th year as coordinator of the MD firefighters' boot drive in Leeds–Grenville. Thanks to the help of firefighters from across my riding who once again gave up part of their long weekend to man roadside toll booths, the boot drive raised \$18,532. That impressive figure will grow much larger, as several departments are still counting their coins.

That's only part of why Tiekstra's story is a great example to anyone who wonders if one person can really make a difference. Sadly, MD Labour Day events haven't been the same, with the illness of Jerry Lewis and the loss of his beloved telethon. It's a sign of the changing times that, two years ago, the call centre in Athens operated by Tiekstra, the only one between Toronto and Montreal still accepting pledges, closed. It would have been easy for Tiekstra to quit then, but he was determined not to hang up on the families that needed him, so for the past two years he single-handedly conducted his own telemarketing blitz while also overseeing the boot drive. I'm proud to say that his personal calls raised an additional \$2,000.

On behalf of everyone in Leeds–Grenville, I want to thank him for his wonderful campaign for muscular dystrophy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all the members for their statements.

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas collecting and restoring old vehicles honours Ontario's automotive heritage while contributing to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, tourism, and support for special events; and

"Whereas the stringent application of emissions regulations for older cars equipped with newer engines can result in fines and additional expenses that discourage car collectors and restorers from pursuing their hobby; and

"Whereas newer engines installed by hobbyists in vehicles over 20 years old provide cleaner emissions than the original equipment; and

"Whereas car collectors typically use their vehicles only on an occasional basis, during four to five months of the year;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Ontario Legislature support Ontarians who collect and restore old vehicles by amending the appropriate laws and regulations to ensure

vehicles over 20 years old and exempt from Drive Clean testing shall also be exempt from additional emissions requirements enforced by the Ministry of the Environment and governing the installation of newer engines into old cars and trucks.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

“Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

“Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

“Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

“Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown” of Ottawa “to Kanata;

“Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

“Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

“Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

“We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now than 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

“We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder.”

I support the petition and will sign it and send it up with Anna.

1320

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Liberal government has demonstrated that it simply does not understand the needs of rural Ontario and has unilaterally decided to prematurely cancel the extremely successful slots-at-racetracks program;

“Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates more revenue than all Ontario casinos combined and is the largest contributor to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.;

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry employs 60,000 Ontarians, including more than 31,000 full-time jobs and is the second-largest employer within the agricultural sector of the Ontario economy;

“Whereas the horse racing and breeding industry contributes \$2 billion into Ontario's economy, with 80% of that spent in rural communities;

“Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates over \$1.1 billion in profits annually to the government of Ontario and another \$345 million that is shared between racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry;

“Whereas local racetracks spend a considerable portion of their revenue on charitable causes in their community;

“Whereas the loss of the slots-at-racetracks program revenue will force host communities to raise local property taxes by as much as 2% to offset the lost funds;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The government of Ontario must immediately recognize the damage that will be done to businesses, individuals and communities caused by its decision to end the slots and racetrack partnership. It must commit to reverse the decision immediately and commit to negotiating a fair, long-term income-sharing agreement between the OLG, racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry, to take effect at the end of the current partnership agreement.”

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition and I will affix my name to it.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I have petitions signed by—I guess there are more than 200 signatures here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiations in medical diagnostic and radiation therapy procedures; and

“Whereas the main piece of legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (HARPA), dates from the 1980s; and

“Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the act have kept pace with the explosion in imaging examinations, including image-guided procedures used in cardiology, radiation therapy, ultrasound, orthopaedics etc.;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommenda-

tions on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I fully agree with this petition. I sign it and pass it on to page Tameem.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Liberal government support Huron–Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson’s private member’s motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed.”

It’s signed by many people from my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

“Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

“Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection

officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Dr. Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes.”

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Jacqueline.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels and is expected to increase another 15% in the near future, yet oil prices are dropping; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

“Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

“Whereas the high price of gas has a detrimental impact on all aspects of our already troubled economy and substantially increases the price of delivered commodities, adding further burden to Ontario consumers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action to protect consumers from the burden of high gas prices in Ontario.”

I affix my name in full support.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north’s economy; and

“Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

“Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately.”

I fully agree, sign my signature and give it to page Ethan.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas the member churches of the Seaway Valley Presbytery are subject to the provisions of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08; and

“Whereas these churches and other non-profit organizations in eastern Ontario’s rural communities cannot afford to pay for the expensive testing required by this regulation or the volunteers to transport water samples to provincially accredited laboratories in urban centres hours away; and

“Whereas public health laboratories have the equipment necessary to conduct the testing required under Ontario regulation 319/08;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Health amends Ontario regulation 319/08 to allow non-profit organizations to have water testing done at existing public health laboratories at no cost.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table.

INFRASTRUCTURE ROUTIÈRE

M. Phil McNeely: « À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Attendu qu’il y a actuellement une étude de l’évaluation environnementale des liaisons inter-provinciales en cours afin de trouver l’emplacement d’un nouveau pont traversant la rivière des Outaouais à l’est du centre-ville d’Ottawa;

« Attendu que la province de l’Ontario investit 220 millions de dollars pour améliorer l’échangeur 417/174 et élargir la 417 de l’échangeur à la rue Nicholas;

« Attendu que ces améliorations ont été autorisées afin de répondre à un besoin urgent des navetteurs d’Orléans et des régions environnantes;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral a déménagé près de 5 000 emplois de la GRC du centre-ville à Barrhaven;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral va déplacer 10 000 emplois du ministère de la Défense nationale du centre-ville à Kanata;

« Attendu que plus de la moitié de ces emplois étaient occupés par des résidents d’Orléans et des communautés environnantes;

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« Attendu que le déplacement de ces emplois aura un impact drastique sur l’économie d’Orléans;

« Attendu que le besoin en infrastructure routière est requis pour les résidents qui devront traverser notre ville pour se rendre à leur travail;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à la province de l’Ontario et au ministère des Transports de faire leur part pour mettre fin à cette étude environnementale; et, bien entendu, que les améliorations aux infrastructures routières en cours sur les autoroutes 174 et 417 bénéficient Orléans et ses environs; et, bien entendu, que la province de l’Ontario supporte la ville d’Ottawa dans ses démarches pour convaincre le gouvernement fédéral de financer le prolongement du train léger du chemin Blair au chemin Trim, lequel est encore plus nécessaire depuis le déplacement des 15 000 emplois accessibles aux résidents d’Orléans vers l’extrême ouest;

« Nous, soussignés, supportons cette pétition et apposons nos noms ci-dessous. »

Merci, monsieur le Président. Je vais envoyer ça avec Jasper. Merci.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario slots-at-racetracks program has, for over a decade, provided mutual benefit to the province of Ontario and the horse racing industry; and

“Whereas the government has announced the cancellation of the slots-at-racetracks program, jeopardizing the future of the horse racing and breeding industry in Ontario at the cost of thousands of jobs and \$2 billion in economic activity;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario work with the horse racing industry to reinstate and improve the slots-at-racetracks program with its revenue-sharing agreement to sustain and grow the horse racing industry to the benefit of our communities.”

It’s signed by many people associated with Kawartha Downs.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

PERFORMANCE PAY AND BONUSES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ACT (MANAGEMENT AND EXCLUDED EMPLOYEES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LES PRIMES DE RENDEMENT ET AUTRES PRIMES DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC (CADRES ET EMPLOYÉS EXCLUS)

Mr. Bisson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act respecting performance pay and bonuses for management and excluded employees in the public sector / *Projet de loi 118, Loi concernant les primes de rendement et autres primes versées aux cadres et aux employés exclus du secteur public.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, a mere 12 minutes—you cannot even build up a bit of a sweat when it comes to giving a speech in this place, but I'll do my best.

Mr. Speaker, the reason that we raise this as New Democrats—yes, this is a private member's bill in my name, but it's also on behalf of our caucus—is that we find it a bit unfair what's happening in the province today. We all understand that the government has a deficit, and we all agree, as the three political parties, that we need to bring that deficit down to balance by 2017-18. It was a position in all of our platforms in the last election. But what we really object to is that the government is really only looking at one side of the equation when it comes to how they're going to balance the budget. They tend to take a Conservative approach, which is to say austerity is the only way to go. As a New Democrat, as a social democrat, I want to say there are other things that you have to do.

It's not about raising taxes, but it's about creating wealth. If, as a government, we took a position to say, what can we do together in order to build more opportunity in our province for people to invest, for people to start up businesses, to continue businesses or help them grow, those economic activities in whatever sector would create more employment. That new employment would create more taxes for provincial and federal governments to pay for very important services such as health care, education, paving our roads or whatever it might be. At the same time, the wealth that's created by the purchases of those businesses when it comes to services and materials and the taxes they all have to pay would lead to the same.

So we agree with the overall objective of the government, which is to say we are going to move to try to balance the budget by 2017-18. As social democrats, as New Democrats, we have a different approach. We think there has to be a balanced approach. For the Liberals to agree with the Conservatives that the only way that you can do that is by way of austerity—we reject that.

Yes, you need to be prudent about how you spend money. If Andrea Horwath was Premier today, you can bet your bottom dollar it would be about making sure that whatever dollars are spent by the province of Ontario are spent wisely and that we don't increase spending at a time of recession on things that are not necessary. There are things at times that you may have to do, and we understand that—but not to go out on a spending spree, such as we've seen with this government over the past number of years, on things that are well-intended but, quite frankly, could have waited a bit until we balanced

the books; and to be reasonable when it comes to expenditure.

The other thing we're wanting to say by way of this bill is: The government is saying that through austerity is the only way to balance the budget, and the way we can achieve part of the austerity targets is to simply say, "We are not going to bargain with collective agreements. We're not going to worry about the messiness of a thing called democracy where people have the right to sit down with their employers and negotiate a fair settlement; we're just going to impose a wage freeze over a two- or three-year period." We think, yes: Should we be having, as a goal, trying to limit how much money we pay out in raises? Absolutely. As a social democrat, as a New Democrat, I can tell you, if I was bargaining on behalf of the government, I wouldn't be trying to give 2% and 3% increases in this time of difficulty financially; I'd be trying to get as close as I can to a fair, reasonable settlement as close to zero as I can get. In some cases, you might be able to achieve that; in other cases, you might be a little bit over that, but such is democracy. People in Syria, people in Egypt and people around the world have picked up guns in order to be able to have the rights that we have in this province and in this country, to be able to negotiate with your employer and to have a democratic process in the way that you deal with these things, rather than having a government dictate, as they do in some places in the world, what it is that we should all be doing.

We agree with the goal of the government to limit expectations and limit outcomes when it comes to negotiation, but where we part company with the government is, we believe it should be done through negotiation and it shouldn't be done by government fiat, as we're seeing under Bill 118, when it comes to what the government is doing with the educational workers and teachers in the province of Ontario.

We're saying that they forgot something. They were really quick off the mark at picking at the teachers and now saying that their next target is the police, and after that it's going to be the firefighters, and they're going to extend it to the broader public sector. We heard Mr. Hudak this morning repeat what Mr. McGuinty said a week before: "They're next on the list, and that's where we're going to go." I just say that that is rather unfortunate, because again, I believe negotiations are always the best way to go. But they forgot to include a whole bunch of people who are managers and others in the public sector who are not part of a union. Why is it that the only way they can save money is to go after unionized workers? Why? There are a whole bunch of people in Ontario who are non-unionized who work for the government—managers and others—who are excluded from collective agreements.

Interjection: They've already had their 2% freeze.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, it's true that the government has said, "We're going to freeze their increases," but there's a back door by way you get increases, and that's these performance bonuses. The Conservatives, when they were in government, argued—wrongfully so, in my

view—that what you needed to do was to have performance bonuses in order to reward managers who do a good job. You know what? People who go to work for us in the civil service are professionals, and I think what we pay them should be transparent and it should be, “You get X amount of dollars to do a job, and these are the requirements we want,” and if we think that’s worth a certain amount of money, then let’s pay it to them. But let’s be transparent. What we now have in the province of Ontario, since the Conservatives put this in some years ago, is a system of performance bonuses that, on average, pays out 3.5% to managers and others in the broader public sector and in the OPS itself.

Am I arguing that people aren’t worth that? No; that’s not my point. I think they’re probably worth every dime of it, if not more. But why is it fair to allow some to get performance bonus increases—how can you freeze the wages in collective agreements and not do the same when it comes to performance bonuses?

What my bill does, in the name of the New Democratic Party, is say that we want to essentially make sure that we don’t change those agreements that have already been signed, because we don’t believe that you should retroactively change what you signed with somebody, but in the future, what you need to do is make sure that you make clear that there’s going to be a freeze for a period of two years, and everybody will be treated the same.

The government is going to get up and say, “Oh, you’ve excluded a bunch of people who have collective agreements.” Absolutely. Absolutely, we excluded them, because as with a manager, if it’s part of a contract, we need to respect those contracts that were signed. I don’t believe, and Andrea Horwath doesn’t believe, that we should be in the business, by government fiat—or a majority of the House, in this case: the two right-wing parties of Ontario, the Liberals and the Conservatives, coming together and voting to essentially freeze public sector wages rather than trying to negotiate, is the way to go; we believe that it is hard work, and what you need to do is sit down with people and work out how you’re going to achieve those particular targets.

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I’ve got to say that I have some experience. I, like most people here, prior to coming to this Legislature, worked in a unionized environment. I was a negotiator on behalf of the local and eventually with the union, and we had to, in very tough economic times in the 1980s in the mining industry, as a union, negotiate freezes and concessions. And I’ve got to say that wasn’t easy. I remember plenty of times, as a negotiator for the Steelworkers for my local, having to sit down with the employer, and it wasn’t about how much money we were going to get; it was how much we weren’t going to lose.

But there was a recognition on the part of workers that—you know what?—if the boss isn’t making money, if the company is losing money, they can’t pay your wages anymore. So workers rolled up their sleeves, they instructed their bargaining committees to go out and do the best job they could, to try not to take too many

concessions, and we did what we had to do in order to save those jobs. I look at what the Steelworkers did in the forest industry in Hearst, Kapuskasing and others, along with the Canadian energy and paperworkers in Kap, at the Kapuskasing Tembec mill. They took some major concessions to keep those places open.

So to argue, as the government and the Conservatives are arguing, that unions are incapable of negotiating in tough economic times and we have to use government fiat to impose freezes, flies in the face of reality. Unions across this province and across this country understand that if there are tough economic times, it’s going to be a tough time at the bargaining table. But it has to happen at the bargaining table. So, as the workers up at Columbia Forest in Hearst or the workers in Tembec in Kapuskasing or in Cochrane or others that have had to do the same over the years, sometimes you end up taking freezes and you agree to those things, as I did as a steelworker back in the 1980s in the mining sector, when we would agree on wage freezes, and we would wait for the economy to turn. We’d agree to a one-year contract and freeze, and go the next year and freeze again, and eventually, when things turned around and the employer was making money, then we were able to negotiate a 1% or 2% increase. Why can’t we do that with the civil service?

All we’re trying to get at with this particular bill is to say that those people who work inside government services, who are non-unionized, who are getting performance pay bonuses that are 3.5% or 4%—based on those bonuses, it is patently unfair for them to get that and expect everybody else to do the same. So we’re saying that’s the genesis of what this bill is about.

I’m going to have a bit of a chance to get back into it a little bit later. I just wanted to lay that out for the first part of the debate and just say to members, I’m hoping that the Liberals and the Conservatives will support us on this in the sense that I think it is the fair thing to do. We’re recognizing there is an economic challenge in Ontario. The government has got to balance its budget. We, as MPPs, didn’t like freezing our wages. We’ve been frozen for how many years now? Three years? We don’t like it, but we did it. It was our part, and we were glad to do it.

It’s the same thing as anybody else. We shouldn’t be giving backdoor increases to managers and others when the workers themselves have to take those freezes. It would be an unfair thing to do. We see the plethora of examples where people have been working for a particular agency or company, and the CEO is getting huge performance pay bonuses, way beyond the wage an employee would get in a year, as a reward for something. Look at what happened with Mr. Mazza up at Ornge, and we look at others who were given huge bonuses as a result of actions they took as managers, and the workers were treated differently. We’re saying, if we’re in this, we have to be in this together, and that means to say that we all do our part. We don’t abrogate agreements, and we’re not abrogating agreements in this legislation. We’re saying for new ones, when there are new agree-

ments that come into place, that we do this freeze. It allows us to be able, together, to do what has to be done to try to get through these very tough, challenging economic times for the province of Ontario on the way to balance.

I just end on the point that you don't do that just by austerity; you have to do that by wealth creation, and we'll talk about that a little bit later in the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to correct the record from this morning's question period. In answer to a question from the member from Kitchener-Conestoga, I listed a series of years. The years should be corrected to read—and listed as 1995 to 2003.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member is allowed to correct his own record.

Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 118 this afternoon. As you've just heard from the member from Timmins-James Bay, it concerns pay for performance. I think it is maybe worthwhile to go back and look at the history of pay for performance in Ontario.

It's a concept that the Harris government brought in initially back in 1996, I presume based on the idea that people will work more if they have some sort of dollar incentive. In 1996, the most senior managers—the most senior officials in the bureaucracy—went on this system, and in 2001 and 2002, it was extended to all managers in the public service.

It's important to understand—and I freely admit I don't have the numbers right, but I do have the concept right. What was done at the time was, let's assume somebody was making \$100,000. Ninety thousand dollars of that became base pay, and \$10,000, plus or minus a bit, became pay for performance or bonus. So if somebody did an amazing job, they might have ended up with \$105,000. If they did an average job, they would get \$100,000, which is what they got in the first place. If they were not totally on the mark, they might get \$95,000, the point being that the program was actually designed, in the first place, so that virtually everybody who was eligible for a bonus got a bonus. That's important to understand as part of the design of the program.

Now, we would agree that there's a problem here. We agree with the problem that the member for Timmins-James Bay has identified. In fact, the Premier has said that if 98% of the people get a performance pay bonus, it's really just pay. We agree with the member for Timmins-James Bay that the public would like to see something that is much more accountable, much more transparent, because it's kind of a weird system where everybody gets a bonus but it's actually not really a bonus in the way you might think when you first hear of it.

It's been really interesting, as this discussion has come about, to hear the outrage from the Progressive Conservatives, who brought in this scheme. You can only con-

clude from that that either they're suffering from mass amnesia, or perhaps this is all just about crass political opportunism. Choose one. But they designed the system; we need to deal with it.

We've actually, in the last few years, cut the amount paid in bonuses by \$34 million. Premier McGuinty has already asked the Minister of Finance to look at this, to review it to find out how we can in fact make the pay for those managers more transparent. He will be tabling legislation. So we agree with much of the intent of Bill 118. I find the content perplexing, however, when I look at the bill and try to figure it out.

As the member has identified, it is actually easy to understand, although the bill enumerates at great length that it applies to non-unionized workers in the broader public sector; it doesn't apply to unionized workers in the broader public sector, and that's fine. I get that; that's the NDP.

What it does is say that if somebody who is currently eligible for a bonus has a new or renewed contract, when that contract is new or renewed, there can be no further pay for performance, no further bonus. What I find really odd about it is that it's temporary. So the effect of this legislation is to end on January 1, 2015, which means that this would appear to only be a two-year pause in bonuses, and one can only presume that we would go back to the original way of doing things, which doesn't seem like the permanent fix that we're looking for.

1350

Then we run into a problem, which is that it's to apply to people who are getting a new or renewed contract. The thing is that most people who are managers, other than maybe people who are very senior officials, don't have individual contracts. They just have a job, with terms and conditions of employment; they don't have a contract. The bill goes on to try and fix this by saying that if anything changes, you'd lose the bonus. Something changing would be that you work in this position for, I don't know, 10 years, and your holiday entitlement goes from two weeks to three weeks. Something has changed; therefore, you would lose your bonus.

Remember what I said about the way these bonuses for performance pay work? It's actually built into your presumed pay. Effectively, if you went from the point where you had a two-week holiday entitlement to a three-week holiday entitlement, for example, that's a change in the terms and conditions of your employment. You'd actually lose pay at that point. This is why I find the bill perplexing.

The other thing—and perhaps this is to fix the problem I just identified—is that the bill actually overrides the bills which currently have a freeze on manager pay. The base pay part of it overrides that, so presumably the base pay could go up.

As I say, I agree with the concept; I'm very confused by the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Let me start by suggesting to my colleague from Timmins–James Bay that it would appear that our parties are getting much closer on the issue of controlling government spending than we were this past spring.

I can also tell the member that I share his concerns that the decision by this Liberal government to give bonuses of up to 12% of their annual pay to 98% of all the managers in the civil service sent precisely the wrong message to Ontarians and to all of the one million other workers who are directly or indirectly paid by the province.

We have a serious debt and deficit crisis in Ontario today. We are quite literally compromising the ability of future generations to enjoy the full range of public services which our generation has come to know and enjoy. With a debt interest cost that now exceeds \$10 billion and is growing by \$1 billion a year, we are rapidly losing the ability to fund new technologies, adapt to emergency situations or handle the demands of an aging infrastructure. What is worse is that the debt interest is growing at a rate of \$1 billion per year, putting more and more pressure on the spending on health care, education and other essential services.

I support, in principle, any constraints that are placed on government spending. It is regrettable that there wasn't support from my friends in the NDP and Liberal caucuses for the private member's bill presented and introduced by my colleague Jeff Yurek earlier this year, which would have implemented a two-year wage freeze. That bill would have completely stopped the need for the bill we are debating today. It would also have eliminated the need to single out doctors, the horse racing industry, the teachers and other special groups. Those groups would all have been content with a single, simple wage freeze. But in each case, the government went beyond the freeze and demanded extra concessions while at the same time giving those 12% bonuses to other civil servants.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I was a high school teacher prior to being elected last fall. Teachers are telling me how disappointed they are that the government has chosen to single them out for the extra cuts. They don't want to lose the gains we've made in education over the last 15 years, but even more, they don't like the inherent unfairness of some civil servants being treated worse than others. Surely the government can accept the principle that the best public policy is equitable treatment of all employees—not bonuses for some and cuts for others.

I believe, as someone who supports the concept of free enterprise, that productivity, not just turning another page in the calendar, should be the criteria that is used to determine pay and benefits, not just within the civil service, but everywhere. Therein lies my only real concern with Bill 118 as it is currently written. For most government employees, there are strictly defined terms of employment. There are expectations of output, and individual employees have limited ability to significantly alter that output. On the other hand, in hospitals, for ex-

ample, it's quite reasonable to assume that not all surgeons are created equal. As they gain experience, it is reasonable to assume that doctors gain the confidence to handle more difficult tasks, or an increased number of procedures, or both. Similarly, in our universities, not every professor is a Stephen Hawking, someone with world renown for their accomplishments and writings.

I would be concerned about a blanket approach that prevents our hospitals and universities, as just two examples, from attracting the brightest and the best of our province. The health care of our constituents and the quality of education of our students should not be limited. In many cases, the hiring may come with a probation period, and a pay scale that anticipates increases over time. I have no problem reconciling that set of circumstances with a wage freeze that prevents blanket increases that have nothing to do with productivity, nothing to do with performance standards, nothing to do with anything other than the calendar flipping over to a new year.

We must adopt far more thoughtful employment strategies that embrace productivity, that reward excellence, that make it clear that the only way to get ahead is to constantly work smarter and harder. We cannot allow mediocrity to be the hallmark of government service.

My time as a teacher convinced me that teachers and other school employees have what it takes to reach higher and higher proficiency and performance goals, not just to help the province return to a sound fiscal footing, but so our students emerge with indisputably the best educational experience anywhere in North America.

I would encourage the member to consider amendments to his bill so that it would cover all civil servants, not just the handful who are excluded from collective agreements. If those amendments were made in committee, I would certainly feel much more inclined to support the bill at third reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I'd just like to start off by saying I don't know how these wages got out of whack. I remember, back in the late 1960s, early 1970s, when I started working in the workforce, that the average CEO, or even the manager in the plant—managers in the plant might have had a 10-to-1 ratio on wages, and the CEO of the whole company would be 20-to-1. If you were making \$20,000 a year at the time, the CEO of the entire corporation was making a little over \$200,000, and maybe the plant manager was \$80,000, something like that, and he'd have 13,000 to 15,000 employees under his jurisdiction.

1400

So what's happened since then to now? I wasn't privy to being in the negotiations at the time, but the governments of the day were, and probably all governments. It's gotten to a point now where it's absolutely out of whack. It's completely unfair. Where does it stop, when does it stop and who is going to have the guts to stand up and do something about it?

We've introduced a bill today that's giving an opportunity to the members of this Legislature to do the right thing and put a halt to these obnoxious wages. They tell people to take cuts and they tell the unions to take concessions. They tell people that they shouldn't be making that kind of money and they should give money back in negotiations with all the companies, yet in this sector, people just keep going up and up and up. I think many bureaucrats in the public sector—and correct me if I'm wrong, Speaker—some of them probably make a lot more than the Premier. So where does it end?

Anyway, this bill before us today is about fairness and transparency. It is simply not fair to ask hard-pressed taxpayers to pay for the hidden bonuses of well-paid public sector managers in these times of high unemployment and declining wages.

How do I explain this to people coming into my riding office, with nowhere to go, with two kids in tow, can't pay their hydro bill—21% of the people in my riding are living below the poverty level—and some of these people are making \$300,000, \$400,000? It's absolutely insane. Where's the fairness? Do these people deserve any less as Ontarians? Do they deserve to have such a division of value? I don't understand it.

Here are some facts, Speaker, that might interest you: 8,700 of 8,900 OPS managers received bonuses in 2011; in other words, 98% of all eligible OPS managers received bonuses last year. With all due respect, I think it's around \$17 billion we're in debt and the whole province is suffering. They're asking teachers to take a hit, they're asking doctors to take a hit, they're asking nurses to take a hit and everybody to take a hit, but there are some people they're leaving out.

Performance bonuses for these managers cost the provincial treasury \$35.6 million in 2011—\$35.6 million in bonuses; what a great province to work in. Performance bonuses and other management bonuses are common throughout the Ontario broader public sector, where the vast majority of managers make more than \$100,000 a year. The Premier of our province makes, I think, \$212,000, with over a \$100-billion budget and, I don't know, countless responsibilities. So how does this add up?

The original intent of performance bonuses was to reward exceptional performance. Well, Speaker, can we say that our society and—we're doing an exceptional performance with a \$17-billion deficit? You can't blame everything on the world market. You can't blame everything on the situation in other countries, on oil. You've got to blame it on management, you've got to blame it on accountability. You've got to fix your own backyard before you can fix somebody else's backyard. Maybe they should start taking a look within themselves and what's going on around them.

The original intent of performance bonuses was to reward exceptional performance. This was clearly not what was happening in the OPS in 2011, where bonuses have obviously become automatic. It's like a drive-through window: "I'll get my 60 grand this year. I think I'll buy a condo in Florida."

I want to be perfectly clear: This bill applies to a lot more than just 8,700 OPS workers and senior managers who received well-publicized—well-publicized, Speaker—bonuses, it applies to the much larger Ontario broader public sector. A rough estimate is that it applies to approximately—Speaker, are you ready for this one?—90,000 managers and will result in about \$200 million in annual savings. This bill is not about tinkering with a broken scheme around the edges, it's about taking the deficit seriously and putting a complete pause on management bonuses throughout the broader public sector.

A couple more specifics about the bill: It applies to all BPS managers whether they have a conventional, time-limited employment contract or not. It, in no way, overrides existing public sector compensation restraint provisions found in other acts. This is a well-thought-out, well-crafted piece of legislation that would bring some fairness to very real challenges presented by a difficult fiscal situation in our province. The question is, is this government really serious about bringing fairness to the deficit fight? I'm not sure. If it is, I look forward to seeing government members vote for this bill. You want restraint? You want accountability? We're giving it to you. All you have to do is say yes. If they're not, and the government just wants to play politics, they'll vote against this bill. We'll find out pretty soon, won't we, Speaker?

I'd like to provide some context to this debate over management bonuses. This government says it plans to introduce a bill sometime in the next few weeks that will fix the broken performance bonus system in this province. Well, Speaker, that bonus system has been in place and broken for every day of the long nine years this government has been in power. So why move quickly now? What's another year or two?

I'll tell you why. It's about politics. It's about the Liberal government trying to get their majority back. You don't want to tick off all your friends. You can tick off some of them and hope the public will turn in your favour, but you don't want to tick off all your buddies and contributors.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, I've been talking to people all over Ontario, Speaker, and they don't think this government deserves a majority. In fact, they know this government doesn't deserve a majority at all. Look what they did with a majority. Wow, I wouldn't want that track record. If I was a baseball player, I'd be batting pretty low. We saw the eHealth scandal under this majority—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: But you're not.

Mr. Paul Miller: I am a baseball player, sir. You might want to try sports. It's good.

We saw the Ornge scandal under the majority. They cancelled a power plant, costing Ontario taxpayers \$190 million, in their majority government. They had an eHealth scandal. They have an Ornge scandal. And guess what the next one is going to be? The next one is going to be governmental services. It's coming. The next Ornge is coming. We've got lots of ammo on that one.

What's going on right now, Speaker, is very cynical. And then they say the New Democrats are determined to bring little fairness to things. Hmm. That's interesting. This looks like fairness. This looks like it's good. We're saying—

Hon. James J. Bradley: The social contract.

Mr. Paul Miller: Oh, that's old news. The minister should get with the times. That was 17 years ago. Come on, Mr. Bradley.

They're saying that those who can afford it most, the tens of thousands of broader public sector managers who have \$100,000, \$200,000, \$300,000, even a million or more, should maybe give up their bonuses for just a couple of years. A couple of years? Wow, I could do a lot with some of that stuff.

I'll reiterate for you. You know that woman who walked into my office with two kids in tow and can't pay her hydro bill and can't get on the waiting list for housing? She might have something to say about all this money that's floating around. You know what? Most of the people of Ontario think that what's going on is a crime.

What is it about this Liberal government's desire to gain back power in this province at any cost—at any cost?

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: You know what? I listen to them criticizing and laughing, but the record speaks for itself. You cannot change what happened. You've done it, it's there and the underlying message is this: Tonight, as the message is starting, you'll find out what's going to happen in the election results, and this is the trend that's going. People have had enough. People are sick of being led astray. People want the truth. People want accountability, and this party has always been that way. Name me one scandal on this party, federally or provincially. You can't. But I could go down a list this long on both of them.

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: Both of them. I could go this long on scandals.

So when the people realize who their friend is, who really wants to be accountable and who cares about the working people of this province, they'll be headed toward the NDP.

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: Go ahead. I will share the two minutes left with the member from Timmins—James Bay. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate. Let me say at the start that as much as I agree with the spirit and the intent, and I think all three parties do, I think it would be a mistake to support the private member's bill we have before us, simply because it won't accomplish what I think the speaker intends to accomplish, or what I think all three parties are saying they would like to accomplish.

1410

Any organization the size of the Ontario public service, whether it be in the private sector or in the public sector, wants to have a competitive method of compensation, wants to attract fine individuals to work for that organization, wants to reward those individuals that perform well, that go the extra mile. It's not unusual to find pay-for-performance or some sort of a compensation package like pay-for-performance or a bonus system in a private sector organization or in other governmental organizations.

I'd say that our public service in Ontario stacks up very well in comparison with other public sector and private sector organizations when you look at the transformation agenda that's been attempted, when you look at the services that are provided and the value that's obtained from those individuals. But what has happened, I think, is what was probably introduced for the best of reasons by the Conservative Party, but they seem to be sort of wanting to wash their hands of it now for some reason—what has happened is that what was supposed to be a means to reward high achievers has become institutionalized within the organization itself, and the reason for that probably is, it's gone on too long without a review. What I think we need to do is to find a way to continue to recognize those top performers that work in the Ontario public service, to continue to treat individuals in a fair way, but to also continue to attract individuals from other jurisdictions, from the private sector or from the public sector, to the Ontario public sector, but do it in a way that truly reflects the best interests of Ontario taxpayers.

I think all three parties have agreed that the current performance pay system needs an overhaul. The Premier stated that he's instructed the Minister of Finance to develop solutions to this issue and to end the current system, to change the current system. My read on this is that this issue deserves more than the private member's bill that's before us. I'm sure it was put forward with the best intentions, but it appears to be put forward in a very hurried manner. It's had to be amended along the way, and I still don't think that it solves the issue that's before us. There are those that would think it was brought forward for very political reasons that have more to do with Kitchener–Waterloo than they have to do with truly adapting the public service here in the province of Ontario.

What I'm suggesting is that we maintain the spirit that we want to do a review of these services, but let's do it in a way that the Premier and the Minister of Finance can bring forward solutions to this House. Let's have a full debate on those, change the system and reform the system to one that truly reflects the best interests of Ontario taxpayers and treats Ontario's employees in a fair manner.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this private member's bill, Bill 118, An Act

respecting performance pay and bonuses for management and excluded employees in the public sector. This private member's bill is designed to eliminate all bonus incentive and performance pay in the broader public sector.

It's my feeling that there is a place for performance pay and incentives if they're managed properly. If the result of that performance pay and incentives are that you get improved public services and if you get savings—I would suggest that you do that by having measurable outcomes—then the result is, for the users of the public services you get an improvement in public services, and for the taxpayers you get a saving in the money spent on getting those services.

I know some of the government members have mentioned that the current system was brought in back under a PC government. I would remind them, however, that they have been the government for nine years. Part of the responsibility of government is managing the public sector, so for them to go on with their eyes shut like they aren't the ones that are running things is a bit—they've been the government for nine years, so they do need to assume some of the responsibility. Under the current system, the way it's being run, we've heard through media reports that 98% of the managers are getting bonuses, so obviously this is not a system that is working, that's going to achieve benefits in terms of improved public sector services, including more efficiencies and saving money for the taxpayers.

What has been proposed by Tim Hudak and the PCs is an across-the-board wage freeze for all public sector employees, including those who receive bonuses. So, to be clear, what Tim Hudak is proposing is that there would be no bonuses or pay increases for a minimum of two years. This would save the taxpayers some \$2 billion a year. We all know that the government is currently spending \$1.9 million an hour more than it's bringing in in revenues, so it's certainly not a sustainable situation.

I must admit that I agree with some of the comments made by the member from Timmins—James Bay, perhaps not the way of getting there, but I thought at first he sounded a bit like a Conservative when he was talking about what we need to do to improve the situation in Ontario. He talked about small business and that we need to improve the economy. We need to grow the economy. We need to create a situation where small businesses can create jobs. I agree with all that. I'd say perhaps we have different ways of getting there but I would suggest that if you talk to just about any small business out there, the first thing they're going to tell you is all the time they spend trying to comply with government regulations instead of going about their business and serving customers, and doing that, creating wealth. So one of the ways we can assist to make our small businesses more productive is to reduce the burden of regulations that they live under.

I also believe that government has a role to play in terms of trying to assist business and assist all those small business people out there instead of just coming in with the hammer all the time and sending government

inspectors around to tell people what they've done wrong. I really believe that government needs to help educate our business people in terms of their many rules out there, but then they need the inspectors to show up at the door, to actually show up and say, "By the way, there are new rules. This is how you can comply and this is how our government is going to assist you to comply with these rules." That would be much more productive and I think it would achieve the goals of both having the rules respected, but also you would get businesses that were doing better and succeeding and growing and creating wealth, as the member from Timmins—James Bay suggested they would.

In closing, I do believe there is a place, properly managed, for some performances, although in the current economic environment our party's recommending no bonuses or payouts or incentive pay for a minimum of the next two years, or any increases to the general public sector.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I recognize that the government still had a little bit of time on the clock, so we'll see what they do.

The reason I wanted to get back into the debate before I get to summation is to be really clear here about where we're trying to go. If the government is saying to us, "Listen, we think there are some changes that could be done at committee in order to be able to deal with this bill, to deal with what the public will say or suggest when it comes to committee," we're open to that. We've always believed and I believe, as a long-standing member here, that debate is all about hearing the other side and then committee is all about hearing others out there, about how we can make the bill that we intend to pass a better bill. If the government has better ideas—or the Conservatives or the public—we are certainly open to allowing those types of amendments to go forward.

The second thing I just want to say is that the basic tenet of this thing is that you can't go around freezing people's wages and allowing a certain class of workers to be able to get those raises. It's not fair that managers and others are able to get raises by the back door, through performance bonuses, and everybody else is asked to freeze. So I'm hoping that we have some agreement on that. I know it was a Conservative idea and it was something that they put in place some years ago, and they will have to come to this decision not lightly, because it will be a reversal of their initial proposal and their policy that they put in place. But I'm hoping that they've seen the way because we do know that along the road to Damascus there is some conversion along the way, and we will welcome the conversion of the Conservatives if they decide to support a good NDP idea.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I just want to remind the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek that there were a number of NDP ministers—when you sat on this

side of the House—who resigned in what I think one could safely describe as scandals. So I don't know when the virginity was restored, but apparently it's some sort of transformative process.

1420

The second thing is this idea that sometimes when you get third party status you get disconnected from reality. I remember how the NDP handled collective bargaining in the public sector. It is legendary in this province, when you opened up collective agreements and eviscerated them. The kind of, I would almost call it, condescension that you're giving this party in government for putting, after five months of negotiations, constraints to meet a fiscal plan—just a little humility, especially as my friend the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure pointed out. If you're trying to get our support, you should, having governed—especially when the Nova Scotia NDP is jacking up the HST, which you argue to cut, and is reducing taxes on the highest-net-worth individuals in Nova Scotia, who are getting a tax break, while you're demanding that we increase it. I just find it inconsistent.

On the education file, my file, where you cut the entire student aid budget in half, we doubled it. You faced similar restraint. We did it. The contradictions are—I don't have time to go through a list of 100. But, you know, maybe Liberals and New Democrats have to compromise in the face of restraint and financial economic difficulties. Maybe we could be kinder to each other when we do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This member shouldn't talk about contradictions, because he's one himself, I'll tell you. He comes from Manitoba, where he was a devout New Democrat, and when the New Democrats wouldn't give him what he wanted, he decided to become a Liberal. That's a whole other issue.

I would just say, again, I welcome support on this bill from all sides of the House. I take it we're going to get some of that, although for different reasons.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Say that out in the hallway.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'll say it anywhere; it's what actually happened.

I just say, I look forward to the support of the House on this particular bill. I just want to repeat that we're looking forward to committee hearings, and if there are some better ideas about how we can get there, New Democrats are always open to good ideas. We don't think one party should monopolize that. We should share in the ideas and making things happen.

Again, it's just patently unfair to ask civil servants to take wage freezes and have them imposed on them when managers are able to get a raise by the back door by way of a performance bonus. I will say that the government refused to allow performance bonuses to go forward for members of the Legislature last spring. I, at that time, argued that you've got to treat everybody the same. You can't treat workers differently depending on where they work if essentially they're all doing the same work.

I look forward to this bill going to committee. I know that there will be some interest in making this bill go forward, and I look forward to its quick passage at second reading and referral to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. We'll take the vote later on in regular business.

ORGAN OR TISSUE DONATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT AU DON D'ORGANES OU DE TISSU

Mr. Milligan moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 58, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to organ or tissue donation on death / Projet de loi 58, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait au don d'organes ou de tissu au moment du décès.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me say what a privilege and an honour it is for me to champion such an important piece of legislation, a bill that I think all members in this House will agree is in no way partisan. This isn't education policy, eHealth or Ornge that we're debating here today. Instead, we're talking about literally giving people a chance to improve the quality of their lives—in fact, very often giving them a second chance at life.

Let me quickly describe the contents of the bill. If passed, this bill would require anyone applying for a driver's licence or health card, either new or renewal, to complete a statement that they either will or will not consent to the donation of their organs upon death. The bill would amend the Health Insurance Act and the Highway Traffic Act to achieve this goal. By making this simple change, it would guarantee that virtually every adult Ontarian would be made aware of the benefits of organ donation and afforded an easy opportunity to sign up if they wanted to become a potential donor.

I can think of few opportunities to stand in this chamber and debate a bill which can so profoundly and so rapidly benefit hundreds of Ontarians who are suffering from any number of ailments and whose only chance at a productive, comfortable, extended life will be as a result of the transplantation of a new heart, liver, lungs or any of the eight different organs and tissue.

Spanning every riding in the province, over 1,500 Ontarians are currently on the waiting lists for organ transplants. That number in and of itself is sobering when you consider the suffering, anxiety and fear that the potential recipient and their family and friends must confront while waiting for a phone call that may never come.

While over 22% of adult Ontarians have signed up for organ donations, it isn't enough. On average, one person

on the transplant waiting list dies every three days. Just think of it: Since this bill was first debated on May 15, 2003, 1,133 people have died while waiting for the call that a suitable organ was available for them.

What is particularly depressing is that one single MPP, back in 2003, denied unanimous consent for this bill to pass into law that day. I can't imagine how that member can reconcile his decision to play optics and politics against the staggering loss that has been suffered by over 1,000 Ontario families since that day. I would be surprised if there were a single MPP who does not personally know someone who has either received a transplanted organ or who is waiting for a transplant. Just amongst my small staff of five employees, one has a husband who, one day, is going to need a kidney transplant, while another has had a sister who, 12 years ago, received a heart transplant.

I've met Patti Gilchrist and her children, and it is truly remarkable to hear the story of how she went from being a virtual invalid as a result of a serious cardiac problem to someone who is healthier after the operation than she had ever been previously to that. Hearing Patti describe the details of how the dozens of doctors, nurses, technicians and paramedics undertook the breathtakingly complicated task of removing a damaged failing heart and replacing it with a healthy heart should be enough to convince everyone that we are blessed to have the level of medical expertise and the publicly funded health care system that is available to all Ontarians today.

The sequence of events that led up to Patti's operation actually started with a tragic auto fatality in southwestern Ontario. The death of a young man who had had the vision and compassion to sign an organ donor card started a process that involved police, air and land ambulances and a team of doctors and nurses at the hospital to which he had been admitted. It is truly remarkable to know that barely 12 hours lapsed between his death and the start of Patti's operation.

Nothing can really show the grief that that young man's family must have felt upon learning of his death, but it must have come as some small comfort to know that his compassion and his generosity meant that that death was not in vain. And 12 years later a vibrant young woman continues to be able to spend time with her family and friends, and contribute to her community.

There are thousands of success stories like Patti's, and the success rate for even the most difficult cardiac and lung transplants improves every year. Organ donation is a very real pathway to a more productive, longer, healthier life for transplant recipients, and I cannot imagine how anyone would not want to ensure that every adult is aware of the importance of these medical miracles.

1430

In addition to raising awareness, this bill makes one other change to the current protocols. Doctors and organ donation proponents have given me countless examples of donors being willing to offer up their organs so that others can have a better chance at life, only to have family members overrule that decision after the death of

the potential donor. I understand the pain those family members must feel, but surely each person should be the final arbiter of what does or does not happen to their body after death. I think it is profoundly disrespectful to ignore the generosity of a would-be donor, and this bill makes it very clear that the one and only person who decides on the donation of their organs is the donor himself or herself. Having made his very generous decision to be an organ donor, if anyone else in that young man's surviving family had contradicted his decision, Patti Gilchrist would not, in all likelihood, be alive today.

Nothing in this bill prevents someone from changing their mind as many times as they may wish to do. But at the end of the day, I think we must be guided by the final decision of each and every person himself.

Earlier today, the Speaker was kind enough to permit each MPP to wear a green ribbon symbolizing organ donation and highlighting the work done by the Trillium Gift of Life Network, the organization established over a decade ago to raise awareness of organ donation. Trillium works with hospitals all across the province to ensure that resources are in place to take advantage of potential donations. I know that there are still hospitals where it would be difficult to undertake transplants. But I am confident that with the sage counsel of Trillium and the ever-increasing size of the organ donor population, the Ministry of Health will ensure that no potential donation is wasted due to the lack of proper equipment and resources.

I want to pay a compliment to the Ministry of Health. Earlier this year, on the exact date this bill was first scheduled to be debated, the ministry announced a program to slowly roll out a questionnaire, as this bill proposes, to applicants for driver's licences and health cards. Let me compliment the ministry for the extraordinary coincidence of the timing of that announcement. In a more serious vein, I quite frankly don't care how or by whom the decision was made. Anything that increases organ donation awareness is to be applauded.

I guess, if I had one minor criticism, the ministry has announced that their short-term plan is to roll out the program in only a third of ServiceOntario locations. I've met the staff at several ServiceOntario offices, and I have great faith that they don't need a one-year phase-in period to be able to hand out a simple questionnaire to licence applicants and then process the questionnaires when they are returned.

This bill would ensure that all ServiceOntario offices would be expected to participate, without delay, to ensure that the maximum number of new donors could be attracted in a minimum amount of time. All of us have a chance to become lifesavers. All of us can display our humanity and compassion, and it doesn't cost us one cent or compromise our own quality of life in any way.

There are folks who will not, for a variety of reasons, participate as donors, and I respect their decision. That is why I don't believe we should follow the lead of countries such as Spain and go to what is now known as presumed consent. In such a system, everyone is deemed

to be a potential donor, and it is the doctors, not the deceased, whose judgment decides whether organs are transplanted or not. I fundamentally believe that Bill 58 empowers adult Ontarians to make that important decision for themselves.

Let me close by reminding my colleagues and those watching that signing up as an organ donor is as easy as going to the website, www.beadonor.ca. You can learn more about the organ transplant program, and in barely a minute you can add your name to the almost 2.5 million Ontarians who have made this important decision. I mentioned that 22% of all Ontarians have registered, but there are some communities where the sign-up rate exceeds 50%, proof that we can collectively do better.

This bill hopes to inspire greater awareness, higher participation rates, shorter waiting times for transplants, and a reduction in fatalities amongst those on the transplant list. I commend this bill to all my colleagues, and I look forward to your support when the bill is called for a vote later this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to stand here today and talk about Bill 58, the Organ or Tissue Donation Statute Law Amendment Act, 2012. Thank you to the member for bringing that forward. It's a very important concept that we, as citizens of Ontario and Canada, should all be aware of and educated on.

As times are changing, so is medicine and so is science. Part of us making society better is also becoming aware of how we can contribute, in a lot of ways, of course, and this issue is to help someone else.

Donating your organs or tissue, to me, is a subject that's very personal, because you have to make that decision or choice of what you'd like to do upon an untimely situation—a fatality, perhaps—that you may encounter. It's a good opportunity for us to take the time, when we go to get a health card or a driver's licence, to actually think about that question. Whether you answer yes or no, that's a personal choice, and no one is judging anyone for that.

I think we've come a long way in society to the point where we are today. Things do have to come to a point where people become aware of the choices they have. In this case, organ donation—the greatest gift that anyone can give to someone else, in my opinion, is life. That's a lot to ask of someone. If you mark yes or no, again, no one is judging anyone for their personal choice. But if you do choose to do that, I can't imagine the gratitude that the recipient of that gift would feel, and their family, their friends. They are going to be able to live a little longer, perhaps, a healthier life.

Today, in Ontario alone, there are 1,526 people that are waiting for life-saving transplants, and thousands more are on a waiting list for a tissue transplant. If more Ontarians, more Canadians, made that decision at the time to participate in this program, we could help a lot of people.

I certainly will never want to be faced with a disease that was fatal, where I was waiting for an organ trans-

plant. It's an awful position to be in. My aunt in Toronto was waiting for a kidney, and for years and years she suffered terribly and was on dialysis. But she was a fighter. She fought so hard and she continued on. She was put on the list for an organ, and by the grace of God she was able to get a kidney transplant, and she's still with us today. So I know the importance of it, that if you choose to be an organ donor, how much of a difference in someone's life you can make. That impact is insurmountable, and no words can really describe, I'm sure, in the person who receives that, their gratitude for having their life saved and having some quality of life going forward.

1440

This bill is a great opportunity, as I said earlier, to have that conversation: have that conversation amongst friends at the Tim Hortons shop, have that conversation with your children, as a parent, and let them know what your intentions are. It certainly has brought this issue to my attention.

Prior to this—I will be honest—I never bothered thinking about filling out that questionnaire. Now, it has actually heightened this issue for me—to discuss it with my husband last night in the car. We were chatting about it, and different points of view. Some people feel there are religious reasons and cultural reasons, and that's very well respected. But those who would like to have that opportunity to think about it now have that choice. It's a matter of choice and it's an option. It's not something you have to do if you're not comfortable with it. If you, for cultural or religious reasons, don't want to do it, you just check "No." But on the off side of that, it's a great way to think about how you'd like to affect someone's life; maybe what kind of footprint you'd like to leave behind if that's something that you're thinking you want to make a difference for.

I think it's so important that we pay attention and educate, because science and medicine are evolving, and this is just part of that piece for us to move forward and think about how we can help our fellow man.

I do have some statistics with regard to the people that are in Ontario. As of September 2012, for a waiting list, just some stats on here, there are 56 people waiting for a heart transplant; a heart and lung transplant, two people; kidney transplant, 1,093; and the list goes on. There's more. I think it just shows that these statistics—there are people who are in a life-and-death situation, and if someone, out of the goodness or kindness of their heart or just wants to make a difference in the world, can think about being an organ donor, one of those people is going to have a life-saving gift given back to them. Ultimately, there is no other gift more valuable than giving someone the gift of life.

I hope that people will pay attention to this bill and take the time to think about that question and ponder it. It's a very serious question for many of us, and so it should be, but I hope that we pay attention to the goodness that's going to come out of this bill and the quality—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Keep on going, Teresa.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'll keep going—and the quality that you can give someone's life after many years of suffering.

We had a celebration announcement recently about the young woman who came to Queen's Park—it was Hélène Campbell. That puts a face to what we're talking about today. Organ donation for Hélène has made her life so different: She actually has a chance at life. Hélène was 20 years old and she was battling a very serious lung disease. She is actually somebody who's very inspiring because she took her situation in her own hands. Through her going to the media with Justin Bieber and Ellen DeGeneres, she brought awareness and attention to such an important issue. She was a fortunate person on the waiting list: She got her lungs, and she's alive today because of it.

When I'm talking about Hélène I'm actually getting goosebumps on my arms, my hair's standing up, because that's how much it would mean to me if myself or one of my children or someone I knew, or a stranger—it doesn't have to be somebody you know. Hélène was a stranger until we met and heard about her. The impact that it has is insurmountable. You cannot even fathom the difference that one organ, in her case, has made. She can continue on and contribute back to society, and she has done a great job by bringing that to us—an awareness.

I just want to say to everyone: When you are looking at filling out your health card and your driver's licence, take the time to really think about it and talk about it. It's something that we need to evolve over time and make part of what we think about when we look at our health and the scientific evolution that we've come to today in helping our fellow man.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It certainly is a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 58, introduced by the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. I feel it's truly a very well-intentioned bill, and I think it reflects his impatience, which I hope we all share in this chamber, to increase the number of organ and tissue donors.

Again, there is an agency responsible for this sphere of activity, the Trillium Gift of Life. Certainly, since they have introduced their online registration for donations in June 2011, there has been an increase, as our colleague from London—Fanshawe has said, sometimes with celebrity endorsements like Hélène Campbell. There has been some increase of some 37,000 donors registered online.

The member did allude to the ServiceOntario actions, where a pilot project has been introduced to ask people whether, when renewing their health card, they would be interested in being registered. I actually experienced that myself. Of course, I was already registered, but certainly the inquiry was made. That has proven to be successful. So we're seeing the numbers go up, and that is being rolled out. Again, I'm impatient to see that rolling out more rapidly.

When people are going to be renewing their health card, they do receive a brochure now talking about organ donation and answering a lot of questions.

I think in terms of the member's bill, hopefully, if we get more discussion at committee, we need to talk about that kind of educational process also going along with the renewal of the driver's licence. At the moment, you probably recall, you get that sort of—you tear off the sides of a piece of paper. I think that needs to be changed because the educational process is very, very important. People renewing their driver's licence should also get the same type of brochure that they're going to be getting with the health card.

The last thing I'd like to see with the bill, as it is proposed, is that for some reason people are just so focused on getting their driver's licence that they sort of give a reflex "No" to this question, whether they should be an organ donor or not. I think this whole educational piece is extremely important and that that needs to be an awareness that every citizen in Ontario has.

We, in York region, have particularly disappointing statistics related to organ and tissue donation, especially in the southern part. I was just delighted to be with the member for Newmarket—Aurora at the kickoff of the York Region Gift of Life Association. I really want to commend the organizers of this association, Alysia Van Veen, Ivy Higgins and Bruce Cuthbert for doing a great job in terms of raising awareness in our community.

We had a prayer breakfast in Whitchurch-Stouffville. Again, the member for Newmarket—Aurora and myself provided all the staff to assist with immediate online registration. The theme of the prayer breakfast, in fact, was the gift of life, the Gift of 8, as it is expressed, in terms of the eight organs that can be donated. It was an extremely successful event.

We are trying to do as much as we can at the grass-roots. At my own community barbecue I held a couple of weeks ago, we had volunteers from Trillium Gift of Life manning the Be a Donor booth. Again, the volunteers were just wonderful. There was an organ recipient, so that Arlene and Jim Lindsay were there. Heather Higgins was also there, encouraging people to go online and to register and continuing this educational process.

I commend the member. I would like to see this at committee because my constituents are also giving me many other ideas of potential incentives. For living donors, as an example, the opportunity—you have to go through many, many tests, usually at a downtown hospital in Toronto if they're coming from my community. The issue of the amount of pay that they receive in terms of parking fees or mileage and this type of thing is absolutely minimal and doesn't reflect the fact that they're doing something wonderful in volunteering to be a living donor.

I think, if we put all these ideas together, we can come up with increased donation rates, which is, hopefully, the goal of us all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to rise today to add to this important debate, and also to lend my support to Bill 58, as proposed by the member for Northumberland–Quinte West. I have to say that I think I can speak very confidently that we are going to get some support for Mr. Milligan's bill today, because I think we all recognize that what he's trying to accomplish with the bill is to help save lives. So I want to thank him for doing that.

1450

Before we talk about the bill, I think it's important that we take a look at the Trillium Gift of Life registry itself and to actually look at the need. I can appreciate some members have already quoted some statistics, and I apologize, I'll be doing the same to some degree. But when you look at the numbers, I happen to think it's a bit discouraging, because when you look at the waiting list now—to have a waiting list of over 1,500 people, I can't imagine the anguish of those parents and families of the people who are on that list, that they have to go day after day waiting for that precious gift of life to help them on their way.

When you look at the statistics, I was quite surprised to see that there are 57 people on the waiting list for a new heart, almost 1,100 awaiting a kidney transplant and over 200 waiting for a new liver. Now, I know that the 10-year trend shows that it has been decreasing and that the waiting list has been coming down, and I know that's good news. I want to make sure that people know that I'm very much proud of the role that the Trillium Gift of Life is playing. By the way, it was created by a Progressive Conservative government. I think that's very important, that we were the ones that created it, but I also think—and I'm sure we all agree—that 1,500 people is just too long a list and that more work has to be done. So I'm glad the member has brought this forward, because the unfortunate reality is that with the list that long, it's inevitable that there will be hundreds of Ontarians who won't make it to get their transplant, and I think that's tragic.

I believe that the bill that's being promoted by the member for Northumberland–Quinte West is really here and it's really going to make a difference, so I'm excited about the debate and about some of the things that have been said by members so far. The bill will accomplish making the difference by allowing the decision to consent to be a donor upon death to be top of mind when someone applies for a new health card or a new driver's licence, and I think that's extremely important.

Really, that's all we're doing today. We're just asking people to say yes or no, to make that decision. I think it's very important, because the choice remains within the individual. It's going to be up to every person who renews their driver's licence or their health card to ultimately make that decision. I think that just by simply requiring them to do that is going to serve as a reminder to that option. Otherwise, I think we'll continue to struggle with the waiting lists that the Trillium Gift of Life is having, because many people in this busy life, although they think about it, ultimately don't make that decision to sign the card, so I think it's very important.

Some of the surveys that I've seen indicate that while 96% of people say they support organ donation, only 40% ever sign the card. We're missing thousands and thousands of potential donors by not asking the question directly to people, so I think this is the right thing. I think making it a standard part of the process at ServiceOntario when we renew our cards is the right direction, the right point, because I know that we need to do everything we can do as legislators to help Trillium Gift of Life.

Now, I appreciate that the member for London–Fanshawe mentioned Hélène Campbell, and I think it's an amazing story about this young lady who was a double lung transplant recipient, and I can remember, like it was yesterday, her and her mother sitting in the members' gallery, and meeting her and just talking to her. I know that my colleague and friend and neighbour Lisa MacLeod, the member for Nepean–Carleton, has had Hélène involved in a number of events in her riding. She's just a tremendous young lady. As we all know, she made headlines around the world, and as the member opposite and also the member for Oak Ridges–Markham said, she has really engaged not just the celebrity but the nation in raising awareness about organ donation. I think there are a number of passionate advocates like her who have been out there raising awareness, and I'm proud that a couple of summers ago I met another very passionate advocate for organ donation. I want to just mention him as well.

Greg Davis, brother of Olympic gold medal swimmer Victor Davis, whose life ended tragically in a hit-and-run, passed through the city of Brockville on a cycling tour. He was on the cycling tour to tell his story and his brother's story about organ donation. It was great that day, as a member of provincial Parliament, a fairly new member elected earlier that year, 2010, to hear the stories of the recipients of the donated organs and to hear them talk about the grandchildren they got to know and the love they were able to share because they received an organ donation from someone who actually signed the card.

I remember one of those people very vividly that day. Denis Richardson wore a sign that read “6,538 days” to represent the 18 years of life he'd been given after receiving a new heart. Dennis pointed out, when he addressed the crowd that day, “Anyone here is more likely to receive an organ than to give one—all the more reason to give one.” It was a really great day, and I know it resulted in many people who attended that event—because it was widely promoted and held at the Brockville General Hospital—who signed their organ donor card right on the spot.

Still, I wonder how many people who saw that media coverage, who read the stories, saw it on television, looked at that event, made the decision that they wanted to sign the organ donor card and then didn't end up doing that. Lives get busy. We all put things off. That's why I think it's tremendous that we have advocates like Greg Davis and Hélène Campbell who want to move this forward and I think are advocates to get MPPs moving

forward. I know many members will have other powerful stories. I think bills like this will help get that waiting list down. That's certainly a very important thing today.

The gift of life is too important to leave to chance. I want to thank the member for Northumberland—Quinte West for using his private member's ballot spot for this bill. I encourage all members to support him and to support this wonderful cause.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to put on the record that I think this is a step in the right direction but just remind the member that former debates at private members' business have had this issue come up before, and it has come from different perspectives. For example, one of my colleagues proposed on a number of occasions that it be an automatic default, that if you don't check off that you don't want to do a donation of tissue or organs, the default would be that you do. For some that was offensive, and I understand that, but it was one approach to this particular issue. This one here I think is a fair compromise because essentially it says, "You've got to pick one or the other." You either say "yea" or you say "nay."

I would ask the member to respond in his two minutes that he has after, what is the penalty if you don't check it off? Because as I read the legislation—maybe I read it too quickly, but I didn't see if there was any penalty. And what's the intent? If somebody doesn't do that, first of all, how does the ministry find out—and that's the whole bureaucratic thing in itself—and what's the penalty if a person doesn't? Does it make the driver's licence null and void? I don't know. What's the penalty?

I think this is at least a fair compromise, a step in the right direction. Who knows? Unfortunately—and let's hope this is not the case—this may save one of our lives one day. It could be anybody in this province who needs, for whatever reason, an organ, as a result of a disease or as a result of injury, that may be donated by somebody involved in an accident. What better gift to give than the gift of life? If you're going to pass away suddenly and your organs could be given for a transplant of heart or liver or whatever it might be, I think that is something that, if people can bring themselves to do it, is a good gift and it's something that may help somebody live on.

1500

I know these issues could be quite traumatic. I'm dealing with a constituent right now who unfortunately lost her son in a car accident, and there were questions in regard to the pathologists keeping some of the organs and not sending them back with the body for burial. I can tell you that's really traumatic. This woman is really depressed over what has happened with her son, who died some years ago in a car accident, and finding out that not all of the body was sent back for burial. I now have to deal with her on that, and I can tell you that people take these types of issues very seriously, because they're painful. It's about a person's life and how we remember them.

Let's hope that this bill passes; I imagine it will. Let's hope we can get this bill into committee in some way that allows us to find a way to do this so that in fact we can get to the point of the bill, and that is, hopefully to allow for more ability to find organs for people who need them in the case of transplant.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to address the bill in front of us today that was introduced by the member from Northumberland—Quinte West. We do support the idea of organ and tissue donation. I think all three parties support that issue.

The bill has come up at various other times, as the member from Timmins—James Bay just mentioned. I was here for previous debates. I think the intent is good. The problem is awareness. A lot of people, when their loved one dies, especially if it's a family member and if it's a sudden death, are more concerned about—they mourn, and they have to decide, when they make funeral arrangements, usually within a few days after the death, whether to have the body cremated, put in a mausoleum or put underground. It's a very emotional issue.

I know people in my riding who have had sudden deaths, whether it be a car accident or another type of sudden death. They come to me and they're very concerned. They're especially concerned about why it happened. In a car accident, for example, "Why did this person only get so much of a sentence for hitting and killing my son or my daughter?" They're not thinking, "You know what? Something positive can come out of this." An organ, or several organs, can come out of the body and save other lives. I think the key is awareness, to let the public know that it is tragic—a death is tragic, especially a sudden death—but something good can come out of it.

It's also very cultural. Many cultures have a certain way of burying a body, and the last thing they want to do is have the body opened up and have organs removed from that body. It's not only an emotional issue; it's also an ethical or cultural issue. Why take the body apart before it's buried? We don't do that. We didn't do that in our generation and in previous generations. But the world has changed a lot.

The government has done something. ServiceOntario launched an online program for donor registration in June 2011 that is easy to use and secure. People go onto this site and register to donate their organs, or an organ. They can go back online, check their status and maybe add some more organs or remove some organs.

I think this has to be brought to the forefront. There are a lot of tragic deaths—I'm not going to read the stats—of people waiting for an organ. We've had private members' bills on this issue come up before. The numbers have risen since our government decided to go online with this ServiceOntario online organ donor registration service in June 2011. It has gone up, but still—and my time is limited—the key is to get the message across that not all deaths need to be a tragedy.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. There's another speaker after me. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 58, which is An Act to amend various Acts with respect to organ or tissue donation on death.

As I understand it, this bill would require, if you're applying for a driver's licence or a health card, the applicant to make a decision, either yes or no, with regard to the question of tissue or organ donation. I happen to think that's a very good idea, so I certainly will be supporting this bill.

I believe it's a good idea because in Ontario right now we don't have the greatest participation rates. As I recall, in the general metropolitan Toronto area something like 17% of people have actually signed up for organ donation. We all know that it can make such a huge difference. We've heard some of the stats: One donor can have an effect on eight lives, either saving a life or greatly improving a life. I think this is something that we can just do so much better in the province of Ontario, and it really will make a difference. I'm very much in support of this.

We have seen some changes. It used to be a little harder to sign up. You had to actually get a form faxed to you from the Trillium Gift of Life organization. Now you can actually sign up online. I'd certainly encourage everyone who has computer access to go to beadonor.ca or to trilliumgiftoflife.on.ca, where you can sign up right this moment if you would like to make a difference and become an organ and tissue donor.

I'm very pleased that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West has brought this private member's bill forward. We do, in the riding of Parry Sound—Muskoka, have some people very much involved in trying to increase organ donation. I have met with constituent Sandra Holdsworth in the last year. In fact, she arranged a friendly competition between MPPs John O'Toole and Frank Klees and myself to—really, just all about trying to raise awareness, getting more people thinking about this issue; not only thinking about it, but deciding that they will in fact make the decision to become a donor. We held a little press conference here at Queen's Park and, as I say, had a friendly competition amongst the three ridings to try to increase the percentage of donors. I'm happy to say that in Parry Sound—Muskoka I believe we're at about twice the metropolitan Toronto average of donors. So that's good. But we can still do better. I'd certainly like to see almost everyone or anyone who can sign up to become a donor.

Thank you to the member for Northumberland—Quinte West for bringing this private member's bill forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to be able to try to contribute something to this excellent discussion this afternoon. The member from Northumberland—Quinte West is certainly advancing something that is possible to

do and would help so many people across this province, and it should not be that difficult.

I'd just like to say that a recent pilot project at a handful of ServiceOntario centres involved asking customers if they wanted to sign up for organ and tissue donations. This was referred to by the member. The program will expand to 91 service centres across Ontario in the coming months and will be rolled out to all remaining locations over the next year.

I went over to speak to the Minister of Transportation on that point, and he certainly showed interest in it. The Minister of Transportation, the former mayor of the city of Ottawa, whom I worked with for three years, would certainly be favourable to getting something moving forward that is more effective. It seems that that recent pilot project is going well, but it will be rolled out to all service centres. That's good news, I think. That's the information that I have.

The other thing that I just want to mention is that everyone is a potential organ and tissue donor regardless of his or her age. That's important for me to get that information out. The oldest Canadian organ donor was over 90 years old, while the oldest tissue donor was 102. So I think it's for all Ontarians to participate.

If we look at the figures, in 2003, 1,036,000 were registered as donors; in 2012, it was 2.4 million. But there are still over three million people who are not donors. I think we have to get to the issue that the member brought up with his Bill 58: that we have to almost confront people. It's not that they don't want to be donors, but the process does not add that little bit of weight to get them to become donors. Private members' bills often don't go very far, but I think, on the all-party support basis that I would see in here, this should be taken forward. I think the Minister of Transportation would be the one to address it to and work with to see if that can't be done as quickly as possible because, as you said, it's not a partisan issue at all. It's an important issue. If we could double the availability of organs for the people of Ontario who are waiting for them, this would be tremendous.

1510

I think your initiative is the right way to go. I'll be supporting it, and I hope all-party support is there for it. The initiative should not be part of a private member's bill. We all know that private members' bills generally do not come forward. This one must come forward in some form, and it may be a form that could be worked out with the Minister of Transportation and get done quickly.

So I thank you for bringing it forward. I look to working with you, if you do need help on this side of the House, to make sure that what you're trying to do here—and, you know, I followed the young lady, Hélène Campbell, in Ottawa as well. We didn't learn her dance, but we certainly saw what she accomplished as one young lady. So, working together and maybe getting her involved, I would like to see this happen as quickly as possible, and thank you for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate.

Mr. Todd Smith: I have just a few seconds here to congratulate my colleague and good friend from Northumberland—Quinte West, Rob Milligan, in bringing this bill forward. He is a big, compassionate, lovable farm boy from Campbellford. I know he cares deeply about his fellow man. He told the story about two people in his small office here at Queen's Park who have been affected directly. I can tell you that yesterday I had a gentleman from Wellington county who was in my office on another matter who had just had a double lung transplant in the last year. It really is a miracle that we can make these things happen, and it takes a little bit of common sense to make this kind of bill happen so we can have more miracles like the ones we've been describing here this afternoon.

So I very much look forward to supporting Mr. Milligan on his private member's bill today. I get the feeling that most of the Legislature will be supporting Mr. Milligan as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate?

There being none, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by thanking my colleagues from all three parties for their thoughtful comments and their generous support of this important initiative: the member from London—Fanshawe for her kind words; the members from Oak Ridges—Markham, Ottawa—Orléans, Scarborough Southwest, thank you very much; the member from Timmins—James Bay; and, of course, my esteemed colleagues here in opposition, the members from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Leeds—Grenville and Prince Edward—Hastings.

We've shown a compassion and concern that I continue to believe underlies the more public display of rivalry and disagreement that tend to be the hallmark of our debates in this chamber. It may be appropriate to have such philosophically driven debates on many political topics, but when it comes to improving the quality of life for all Ontarians, and particularly for those who have found themselves on the organ transplant waiting list, surely there can only be one common resolve. Improving organ donation rates, reducing the waiting time for transplants and lowering the fatality rate amongst those waiting for transplants are precisely the sort of goals I'm sure all of us set for ourselves when we consider the positive contributions we could make in our communities by serving in elected office.

I want to commend the folks at the Trillium Gift of Life Network and organ recipients such as George Marcello for their ongoing efforts to raise awareness, and of course the shining star, the young Hélène Campbell, for hers. Simply, please visit beadonor.ca, and in a minute you can show your compassion and generosity. And who knows? Somewhere else in Ontario, someone may be making a similar gesture which would save the lives of many Ontarians.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Ottawa—Orléans on a point of order.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I just want to correct the record. It's the Minister of Government Services who would be in charge, not the Minister of Transportation. He was very encouraging that he would be willing to work with us. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The point of order is accepted. The member is allowed to change his own record.

We will take the vote on that particular bill at the end of private members' business.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government should re-evaluate policies that negatively affect residents of rural and small-town Ontario and are a source of growing frustration in rural communities, which are key to a strong healthy province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: "The Rural Urban Divide Has Never Been So Clear." This was the headline in the Ontario Farmer published the day after the last provincial election. The article discussed how rural Ontario had just voted. This debate is not about election results. It's not about partisanship, and it's not about individual grievances or entitlements. It is not to diminish the importance of our cities or their challenges; they too are coping with higher taxes, higher hydro bills and fewer jobs. This motion is about a sense among many who live in rural areas, in our towns and villages, and even in our small cities, that our concerns and aspirations are not being heard. This motion is a first step to address the rural-urban divide, which is wide and getting wider. It is the chance to discuss just a few of these issues contributing to that divide.

Some of the issues we hear about most often are:

- the Green Energy Act and wind turbines in particular;

- the government's decision to end the slots-at-race-tracks program;

- the government's school transportation procurement policies;

- the unaffordable costs facing rural municipalities in implementing provincial regulations across multiple ministries;

- excess red tape facing small businesses and agriculture;

- skyrocketing hydro costs affecting key industries and key employers in rural Ontario; and

- the government's refusal to share gas tax revenues with small and rural municipalities.

I hope this motion will allow my colleagues on all sides to contribute their ideas on how we can bridge the rural-urban divide, a goal that we should all share.

Here's a sample of what the media has been saying: "County councillors have called for a public meeting that asks all county residents, plus anyone else from rural Ontario, to discuss what they see as a war against them by urban areas and led by the provincial Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty." That's from the Wellington Advertiser, May 4, 2012.

"The need to bridge the rural-urban divide on wind turbines, a key producer in the province's Green Energy Act, emerged as an overriding issue at the meeting attended by about 200 people from a broad sweep of southwestern Ontario." That's from the Stratford Beacon Herald, March 15, 2012.

Municipal leaders also have expressed concerns. This summer, I met with municipal leaders from Perth-Wellington in Mount Forest, along with the leader of the official opposition. Municipal leaders told us that the province too often imposes unfair and unrealistic financial regulatory or environmental pressures on rural municipalities. The costs of maintaining provincial connecting links and the cost of complying with provincial source water protection laws have been expressed repeatedly. I'm sure other members have also heard these concerns from municipalities they represent.

Municipal leaders in Perth-Wellington have taken a strong interest in this motion today. I'd like to share a few of their comments. I am grateful for their support, including the endorsement of the township of Perth South council. Councillor Dave Turton from the town of Minto wrote to me and said, "You are right on the money when you say our municipalities are challenged with the rural economies and trying to keep the industries we currently have with the high cost of hydro, water and roads."

Councillor Neil Driscoll from the township of Mapleton said, "We in rural Ontario are tired of being the low-cost solution to big-city problems."

People who live in our cities, small and large, are also concerned. Councillor Kerry McManus of the city of Stratford cited "lack of support for rail service and an agenda that will see prime farmland paved."

I also want to share what Councillor John Nater from the municipality of West Perth had to say: "As rural councillors, we are not looking for charity from the provincial government; we are looking for a partner. The current Liberal government seems perfectly content to sit back and watch Ontario's breadbasket struggle in vain."

1520

I can tell you that Councillor Nater is not alone in this view. It is the result, I believe, of many policy decisions that this government has taken over many years.

I want to return to some of the issues I mentioned earlier. Many times we've told this government about the divisions that its Green Energy Act has created in rural Ontario, and so it's just not a matter of rural versus urban. The Green Energy Act also has pitted neighbour against neighbour. Wind turbine proposals are tearing communities apart as never before. Anyone who has attended public meetings on these proposals will know all about that.

Councillor Andy Knetsch from the township of Mapleton had this to say about the Green Energy Act: "Basically, I have difficulty with the province telling us, the local citizens, what is good for us via the creation of legislation and, thus, tying our collective hands."

By forcing municipalities to accept industrial wind farms, even when there is an overwhelming local opposition, the province is telling rural Ontario that its views don't matter. But then the Premier adds insult to injury. He dismisses concerns of rural Ontario as NIMBYism. He says he won't tolerate NIMBYism. But of course he does tolerate NIMBYism when seats are at risk. Not only does he tolerate it, but he wastes \$190 million, so far, to cancel a power plant during an election, a plant that his own government put in Mississauga, and he cancels another plant in Oakville, wasting hundreds of millions more dollars. That isn't just another example of unconscionable waste. There have been many, many of those. It's an example of a government with one standard for urban Ontario and quite another for rural Ontario.

But rural Ontario is taking notice. It's not just the big examples of waste and mismanagement that rattle us; it's about the little things. It's about a government official in Toronto who, no matter what the issue, always seems to know better than municipal staff. It's about agencies like MPAC, for example, which seems quick to produce glowing reports on improved service but slow to respond to municipal concerns about delayed assessments, lost revenue and homeowners facing massive catch-up tax bills.

It's also about the permit denied for reasons no one can understand. It's about the general lack of understanding about the importance of agriculture, not just to our rural economies but also to the entire provincial economy. It's about a government that doesn't understand and doesn't appear to care about the importance of the equine industry to our rural economies. If it did, it would not have cancelled the slots-at-racetracks program, and it would not have done so with no consultation whatsoever from rural communities or the industry, and without so much as a credible economic analysis.

Councillor Mike Tam from the municipality of West Perth tells us how important this industry really is: "I am passionate about horse racing. Dalton and Dwight should go to Clinton on a Sunday and watch the hundreds of trucks and trailers roll into town in need of food and fuel."

In May, I attended a public meeting organized by the county of Wellington to discuss the future of the industry. About 200 people attended. They shared personal stories about how the loss of the industry would affect them. With frustration and bitter disappointment, they called out this government for its lack of understanding of rural Ontario. They were outraged that the government would kill the horse racing industry, seemingly to support its intention to build large casinos in urban centres. Many see their own province waging a war against them. It's no wonder that we have a divide.

It's about overregulation. The Endangered Species Act, for example, is set up to protect animals, a worthy

goal no doubt, but in the process it can be a hardship for farmers by requiring them to set aside land that the government is taking away from their income. Farmers tell me simply, "If you want to use my farm as parkland, you'd better pay admission."

In fact, farmers have made huge strides to become more efficient and even more environmentally responsible. They're using more and more better technologies like GPS systems to avoid overspraying their crops. Many farmers are experimenting with biogas and other forms of clean energy, and in most cases, they are doing these things on their own, without government mandates.

Our municipalities are also taking leadership. The county of Wellington's Green Legacy tree planting program is a perfect example. Trees for Mapleton, a partnership among local governments and community organizations to help farmers adapt to climate change, is another, and there are many more examples from Perth county as well, all of which is to say that there is hope.

While there are still many challenges and many threats to our rural economies, there is reason for hope. Our communities are still strong. I believe they will withstand the challenges of today. Ultimately, they will survive and thrive, but that takes work. It requires all of us to listen, acknowledge areas where the government must do better, and do what we can to put rural Ontario on a sustainable footing.

I'm grateful for the advice of Rob Hannam and Rob Black from the Rural Ontario Institute. They wrote to ask policy-makers, politicians and government staff to apply a rural lens on policy options being considered. They credit the government for, on occasion, recognizing the need for a different approach in rural areas on programming across many ministries, but they say we need to discuss the adequacy and scope of their implementation.

Different parties may not always agree on all issues, but we don't have to agree in order to support my motion today. By supporting this motion, we are simply affirming the words posted on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs that strong rural communities are key to a strong, healthy province, and we acknowledge that the government should re-evaluate policies that may be causing angst and frustration in rural communities. Make no mistake, there's plenty of that.

One of my constituents said it best: Rural Ontario desperately needs your help now. We are being broadsided by freight trains at every turn. Surely we can agree that the growing divide between urban and rural Ontario is not healthy. Surely we can agree that to bridge that divide, to move forward as one province, we need our entire province—rural, urban, north and south—to be successful. I ask all members for their support of this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion put forward by the member from Perth-Wellington.

This is a very important discussion, because it's one of the biggest challenges that face rural and northern

Ontario. The greatest problem in policy is that it's made, by and large, by people who live in Toronto or in the GTA who really have no concept of how large Ontario is or really how diverse it is. They don't even realize, for instance, that there are two time zones. My riding is entirely in the central time zone.

For those of us living outside the GTA, we know that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. There seems to be a belief that if a system works in Toronto or Mississauga, it should work across the rest of the province. There is a lack of realization that some of these policies just aren't feasible in rural areas. I'm going to give you a couple of examples. I'm going to try to be quick, because I want to share my time with my colleague and seatmate from Temiskaming-Cochrane.

For instance, health care delivery is different because of the vast geography, and the rules that are in place simply don't translate in the north. Rural health centres can't compete, because the fee structure is very different, yet patients need access, because the closest large hospital is sometimes hours away. Municipalities are cash-strapped and are paying for land ambulance costs, because their coverage area is thousands of kilometres with limited resources. It just doesn't work in the north. I know that in some areas of the province private companies are able to step in. It's just not profitable in northern Ontario, at least in northwestern Ontario.

Access to essential government services is blocked because the government doesn't realize the problems it creates when every town does not have access to essentials like ID cards, health cards or other ID. I've had a steady stream of people come into my office who aren't able to get jobs because they aren't able to access these ID services.

Programs like the mandatory vehicle branding program have no way of adapting to northern realities. The entire riding of Kenora-Rainy River, which is the largest riding in the province, has a total of zero service centres offering this service because it's too costly and there's too much liability, meaning that if people are coming from out west and they want to set up in northwestern Ontario, they have to find a way to illegally get their vehicle to Thunder Bay, some 400 kilometres away. That's a huge gap.

1530

Even programs like Ontario Works and ODSP: Their intake is limited because they require in-person interviews, requiring someone who lives in my riding, in Ignace, to travel all the way to Thunder Bay to do an in-person intake. Again, it's not feasible for people who just don't have the resources to make that trek—and with bus service being limited. Injured workers, for example, are expected to travel to Toronto to be reassessed by WSIB. Even recent legislation like the anti-bullying bill does look good on paper, but in practice it's very problematic. What happens to a person who lives in Ignace, a child who is guilty of bullying? Do we condemn them to a life of no education because the nearest school is over 100 kilometres away?

School boards are being told to amalgamate to save money, despite geographic regions that are big enough that 10 or even 20 different southern school boards could fit in some of these large, rural, northern school boards. There's just no realization of these challenges.

I wanted to close by talking about Nova Scotia. They've been trying to experiment with a novel idea: moving departments and ministries outside of main urban centres to ensure that they have a fuller view of the needs of the province. This isn't a bad idea, and one that we should maybe consider in Ontario. Why not expand some of the ministries that are provided out of Thunder Bay, for instance?

This motion is very important, but it's also important that we create permanent structures to review legislation for some of the shortcomings I have raised. This motion doesn't go far enough. It identifies that we need to re-evaluate, but how?

I respectfully suggest that we enact the motion that my seatmate here, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, brought forward to create a northern committee. Maybe we should take that model and we should create a rural committee, or something to that effect, where we as legislators can have greater control over the legislation that comes forward—existing legislation. I think things should work a little better and how the people of this province expect them to work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Grant Crack: It's also a pleasure for me to be able to speak to this, as a rural member in the Liberal Party as well.

The way I see it, this is just another wedge issue by the Conservatives that they've put forward to create this image that the Liberal Party does not understand rural Ontario. On the contrary: We create policies for all of Ontario, whether it has to do with health care, infrastructure or education. We create these policies, and we know that at the end of the day, they're in the best interests of Ontarians in the long run.

I was very fortunate because I was able to serve as a mayor for 11 years. So I completely understand the relationship between rural Ontario and the provincial government. I was elected at 31 years old, unlike my colleague from Leeds-Grenville, who was much younger. I had the opportunity to serve during the Harris years as well as through the McGuinty years, and I can tell you that the most friendly government of the two was the Liberal government that I'm currently a proud member of.

It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because they're talking about this divide between rural Ontario and urban Ontario, yet all the members of the PC caucus stood up and voted against Bill 11, the Attracting Investment and Creating Jobs Act. That is sad, because every mayor in eastern Ontario and every mayor in southwestern Ontario wanted this—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We've been going along pretty good. I think all of you are en-

titled to your diverse opinions, but I'd like to have some peace in the chamber.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, I think the member has a point, though.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: And he's going to repeat it.

Mr. Grant Crack: What was the point?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Southwestern Ontario and eastern Ontario.

Mr. Grant Crack: We put forward a bill that builds on the eastern Ontario development fund to help southwestern Ontario. In Kitchener-Waterloo, for example, the whole area was wanting this bill. In eastern Ontario, the mayors and the wardens are upset with the members of the opposition for voting against this. They don't want to create jobs. They claim they want to create jobs in the province of Ontario, but they don't have the policies to do it.

Let me tell you about some of the good work that the Liberal government did in my riding while I was a mayor. We saw numerous school upgrades, and new schools in Rockland, Navan, Casselman and Vankleek Hill. We've seen expansions at Glengarry Memorial Hospital. There's a new \$100-million expansion at Hawkesbury General Hospital coming forward. We've seen community health centres in Bourget. These are all rural areas. We've partnered with our mayors and we've partnered with our councils to help them improve their local infrastructure, whether it's water, sewer systems, waste water. We work with them on their roads and their bridges. We've invested billions of dollars as a government. They're in very, very difficult economic times.

I can stand here very, very proud and say that we continually evaluate our policies and our programs and we're always trying to find, in the best interests of Ontarians, what is going to work and what is not going to work. I would hope that the members opposite would realize that tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to speak in support of this excellent motion by the member for Perth-Wellington. I really hope that the members of the government pay attention to this motion because I think it really speaks to the heart of why the Liberals were almost shut out of rural Ontario during the last election. As we all know, the McGuinty government lost seven incumbents in those rural seats, but I'm not sure that they've learned their lesson yet. It's not so much that the government isn't working with rural and small-town Ontario to create jobs and grow the economy; policies like the Green Energy Act, the school bus RFP process and the attack on the horse racing industry show that the government is actively working against rural Ontarians.

Speaker, I want to use my time to provide just a couple of examples in my riding of Leeds-Grenville. For years, the government has talked about improving a deadly stretch of Highway 15 just east of Seeleys Bay.

This summer, we were shocked when plans to create a pair of passing lanes along the highway were scaled back. Instead, MTO announced that they were just going to do some paving. Do you know the reason? MTO claimed that the Endangered Species Act made the work impossible because it might impact on grey rat snake habitat. MTO is actually determined to put public safety on the back seat in regard to the protection of snakes. From what I've seen of the plan, the only endangered species are going to be motorists along Highway 15. So that's one example.

The second example: Over in the village of Toledo, the great people who operate Legion Branch 475 are burdened with the high cost of monthly water testing imposed by the Safe Drinking Water Act. Somehow they've been labeled a high-risk location even though every water test ever done at that Legion's location and, for that matter, any other well in the village in the past decade has come back spotless—every single one over 10 years. When they ask the local officials if there was some flexibility in the legislation because of their perfect test record, they're met with a shrug and told, "Sorry; there's no flexibility in the legislation."

Finally, we have the source water protection regulations threatening to make the village of Mallorytown a no-go zone for future development. Real estate agents are actually refusing to list homes in the village. Restrictions are being forced on homes and businesses because Miller Manor, a social housing unit in the village, is municipally owned. If you or I owned it, Speaker, the rules wouldn't apply. Same building, same residence, same well, but no regulations, because private ownership is different.

The bureaucrats trying to force this craziness on village residents wonder why they're met with howls of outrage. They actually think that if they can just manage the message better, all will be well. What the McGuinty government doesn't understand is, the problem is what they're saying, not how they're saying it. When your message makes no sense and undermines rural Ontarians—whose hard work, I might add, built this province—it doesn't matter how you try to sell it because nobody is buying it.

I hope that everyone will support this member's motion. It makes sense. Let's stand up for rural Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

1540

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure for me to stand and speak to this motion. I agree with almost everything Mr. Pettapiece said. There is a rural-urban divide. One thing I've learned since I've come to this House—I thought it was just the northern-urban divide. The issues are different, but the underlying case is the same.

There have been some good examples given, but I'll give another one. There are a lot of schools closing in my area, and the mayors are trying to save the schools. Because when you have a town that's an hour away from any other town, the school is very important. The school board is doing what it can, but there's no budget line for

helping the community. So in ridings like mine you're soon going to have little kids—you know, kindergarten—who have to be bussed an hour or an hour and a half. It's things like that that everyone knows are problems. When you talk to the people involved, everyone knows it's a problem, but there seems to be no way of solving the problem.

I think if there's one thing this motion is missing—I'm hearing lots of, "Yes, there are huge problems," but I'm not hearing any way of solving them. In our area, some of the ones that are real killers are the Far North Act and the Endangered Species Act. But you know what? Just ripping and tearing and scrapping them isn't going to solve the problem. We don't want to go back. In northern Ontario, we don't want to go back to no planning process. We want to have a planning process, but we want to be involved in the planning process. That's the problem.

It's the same with ONTC. You know what? Everyone realizes that hard decisions have to be made. But it shouldn't have been up to a few bureaucrats somewhere else to make those hard decisions. Northerners should have had a seat at the table before the decisions were made. It's the same with rural Ontario. We need a seat at the table. What's not working here?

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: I hear someone from across the room and people from this side heckling.

There are so few rural members compared to urban, because it's representation by population, that we need a way for rural members to talk and make amendments together. When I talk to members across the way and when I talk to members on this side, do you know what? We disagree on some things, but a lot of our basic thought processes are the same.

One thing I find that this government is doing is not taking into account the skill set of rural Ontarians. Look at the OLG horse racing thing. People say, "Well, there are so many." But there are 30,000 people for sure who have a unique skill set. It's not being used. It's just being discarded. People on every side of the House have ideas on how that skill set could be used, and those people don't deserve to hear heckles across the way. Those people, and not just these people, deserve to hear opposing views, but they need to hear a serious debate on their issues.

My colleague from Kenora—Rainy River mentioned the northern committee. I truly believe that something like a rural committee with people from all parties who could put amendments toward legislation proposed by the government and that those amendments would have to be debated—they might not win, but at least you would have to debate rural issues. Right now they're not truly being debated because, quite frankly, it's representation by population. And something the PCs are going to have to do, if they want to form a government, is get more city votes.

Mr. Paul Miller: You better be nice to us.

Mr. John Vanthof: But it's true. To win an election, you need representation by population. Somewhere we need to find a different vehicle to solve problems that affect people who aren't in populated areas, and that's a big issue. It's because of representation by population. That issue isn't going away, folks. Northerners have felt it for a long, long time.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: City slickers don't get it.

Mr. John Vanthof: I don't believe that the urban people in Toronto—this is the first time I've ever lived in Toronto. I don't believe that the average person on the street is out to get the country guy. They just don't understand, and there's no vehicle. And quite frankly, we're not helping by yelling across the aisles. We have to find a better way to do it.

Our party supports this motion, but quite frankly, I don't think it goes far enough because it doesn't propose a solution. The people in northern Ontario who are up to here with what they feel is a blasé government that really doesn't care, and I think the people—from what I understand from my colleagues to the right here—in rural southern Ontario are about at the same level.

We've got to get together. And you know what? No one buys it. No one buys that everything's fine out in the country. I agree with that. But we have to find a solution. If someone has got a better solution than doing a committee but, for northern Ontario, we strongly believe—that's why we proposed it—that a northern committee, made up of all parties, including cabinet ministers who could make amendments to legislation, which would then be debated in the House with no veto power but at least with legislative debating power, that would make a big difference for northern Ontario, and we truly believe that it would make a huge difference for southern Ontario, for rural Ontario.

We'll give you a warning. You're going to get into a big argument about where southern Ontario is, where rural Ontario is, because we're having that now. Everybody wants to be in northern Ontario right now.

In closing, this is the first step; it's identifying part of the problem, but it's not identifying a solution. Long-term, in this House, we're going to have to find a solution because there are people in my riding who have given up on government totally, and we're not helping with this. So, something like this, along with a rural committee would be a big step.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I was somewhat reluctant to speak on this motion this afternoon, but I think it's important that we get some words on the record.

First of all, I represent the wonderful riding of Peterborough, a community where I was born and raised. Some 40% of the riding of Peterborough is rural. Five municipalities in Peterborough county are in my riding, and I'm so pleased to have wonderful relationships with those five rural municipalities.

It's interesting, as we debate this—I want to roll back the clock to 1998. It was the AMO convention of 1998.

The then Premier of the province of Ontario, the Honourable Michael D. Harris, spoke at AMO. On that particular day, he went into the big ballroom to talk about the exchange of municipalities in terms of responsibilities in the province of Ontario, and he said—because I was at the back of the room, a city councillor at that time from the city of Peterborough—“Ladies and gentlemen, I'm announcing a rearrangement of responsibilities of the province of Ontario, and I can assure you that this is going to be revenue-neutral through the Who Does What committee.”

Let me tell you, that exercise was the “who got done in” committee, and who got done in were the rural municipalities in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker, and that is a fact. Rural municipalities got done in.

Let me tell you, 43% of the roads in the province of Ontario got downloaded in eastern Ontario and saddled those rural municipalities with expenses that they never had a chance to do that. That's a fact.

The other thing that would happen: Mr. Harris reduced the number of seats in the province of Ontario from 130 seats to 107. Who paid the price with that seat reduction? Rural Ontario. Rural Ontario lost seats through that particular exercise. I think it's time that we set the record straight.

But let me look at what we've been doing. When it comes to the risk management program in the province of Ontario—

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to do a point of order on the fact that the member from Peterborough was wandering a little bit from the motion that we're talking about, and I would ask that he keep it within the confines of the motion and not go on a verbal attack of the opposition parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'm listening carefully to the member and—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the clock was at six minutes and 30 seconds when—

Interjection: Sit down, Ted.

1550

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Leal.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I've obviously touched a nerve with my friends opposite over here.

Interjection: Is he defending Mike Harris?

Mr. Jeff Leal: They're defending—well, let me tell you what we've done.

In the riding of Perth—Wellington, we've made some strategic investments. I want to talk about the Happy Valley Health Team: hired eight doctors, hired six health care professionals, provided care for 9,778 patients and 2,227 unattached patients.

Let's keep going. Stratford Family Health Team: hired 14 doctors, hired 12 health care professionals, provided care for 24,000 patients—

Mr. Bill Walker: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order.

Mr. Bill Walker: Speaker, with all due respect, I'd like to stick to the motion on the floor, the bill that we're talking about. It's the urban-rural divide. We're not talking about health care clinics; we're not talking about their spending. We're talking about the bill that's on the table.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I hear you and I'm listening to the member.

The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, these folks don't want to hear about good news in rural Ontario. I'm going to keep delivering good news.

Let's go to the Mapleton-Minto Wellington Family Health Team: hired eight doctors, hired 11 health care professionals, provided care for 12,120 people, added 3,394 unattached patients to provide better health care for rural Ontario.

The Mount Forest Family Health Team: hired eight doctors, hired nine health care professionals, provided care for 8,632 patients and another 577 unattached patients.

If we're going to have a balanced debate in this House, let's talk about all the positive things we're doing in rural Ontario.

Let me tell you about the risk management program for cattle. The risk management program for cattle was invented right in the county of Peterborough. It was cattle farmers from Peterborough that put the model on the table that was approved by this government because we were listening to rural Ontario when it came to the risk management program.

I could go on and on and on—not to say that from time to time we shouldn't look at policies. We should look at policies to see if they are meeting their key benchmarks and their key targets. I think that's very important. In this motion that the member has referred to, I think there's a nugget of positive initiative there. The fact is, from time to time you take a look at policies.

Look, the Canada pension plan was brought in in 1965. I think now there's a consensus throughout Canada that it's time to look at the CPP again. That's the kind of thing, the positive element, that's in this member's motion. But let me tell you, he missed out all the positive things we're doing in rural Ontario. I just wanted to set the record straight this afternoon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I will strive to lower the temperature in this room since my colleague from Peterborough had an overdose, I think, of ice cream.

It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of this motion tabled by my colleague from Perth-Wellington. I'm proud to say that I'm from one of Ontario's leading rural communities. My riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex is home to some of the most fertile agricultural land in the province, yet for nine long years—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Mr. Rick Nicholls:—this government has taken rural regions of Ontario for granted, especially regions from my area such as Chatham-Kent, Leamington, Blenheim, Ridgeway, Wheatley and Tilbury—one massive disappointment and oversight after another at the expense of any voter that doesn't reside in the 905 or 416 area code.

The worst of these slights against Ontario's rural municipalities, in my mind, was the Green Energy Act and the stripping away of local decision-making powers over new local energy projects. Simply put, the McGuinty government legislated themselves the power to plant an industrial wind turbine wherever they pleased in rural Ontario.

And I know something about industrial wind turbines because I happen to come from the one municipality in the province that boasts the highest density of industrial wind turbines. Look at any spot on the horizon and you'll see them. The vision is especially eerie at nighttime when the red glow is across the fields.

Chatham-Kent currently hosts around 300 wind turbines across the region, and another 124 are slated to go up by 2014. That would mean nearly 500 wind turbines were planted within my riding while local authorities were powerless to share the thoughts and concerns of families in these communities. Instead, they turned to their local elected officials to have their voices heard. I know my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex has heard just as powerful a response as I.

The simple truth of the matter is this: Many moms and dads in rural Ontario feel that the McGuinty wind turbine experience needs another look. First of all, they are expensive. As our energy critic has rightly pointed out numerous times, Ontario hydro bills are set to skyrocket in upcoming years thanks to these expensive energy experiments.

Next, a number of families have approached me with concerns about the effects that these wind turbines may have on human health, a concern so under-recognized by the McGuinty government that the federal health minister has now had to step in and conduct a health survey as a way of getting the conversation started.

It seems that when the Premier sought to eliminate local decision-making with the Green Energy Act, he was also quietly seeking to shut out the voices of regular citizens as well. Only in rural Ontario was this happening, mind you. When the member from Scarborough Centre was threatened with the loss of his seat thanks to an offshore wind farm, why, you've never seen a government do such an abrupt about-face on one of their key issues. I was reminded of the member from Scarborough Southwest, who put forward a private member's bill concerning the welfare of elephants in city zoos. Yet that member stands with a Liberal government that has essentially legislated the deaths of 13,000 horses in rural Ontario with the closing of the slots partnership.

What are Ontarians supposed to take from this? Simply this: The needs and concerns of urban Ontarians are simply more immediate and pressing to this government, and policies affecting rural communities don't often warrant a critical look.

I remember I was asking a small child that lived in the city, "Where do milk, eggs and prime rib come from?" His answer was, "The grocery store." Could it be that this Liberal government is getting further and further out of touch with rural Ontarians? Wake up, my friends, before it's too late. Oh, by the way, the answer to my question is actually, "Holsteins, chickens, and Hereford cattle."

I'm proud to stand with this member from Perth-Wellington in calling for more care and attention when it comes to legislating rural Ontario. Ontario's agricultural communities in particular, like the one I hail from, are the backbone of our province's natural bounty. They deserve better than the treatment they have received from this Premier.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to applaud and support my colleague from Perth-Wellington, Randy Pettapiece, for bringing up something that really is a true thing that we should be talking about in this House.

I have concern, though, that the Liberal government is purposely creating a divide and is governing with a one-size-fits-all, all based on the populace of the GTA. It's no wonder that my predecessor, Bill Murdoch, continually went to the paper and the media and said, "You know what? The GTA should become its own province, and the rest of us will govern on our own, because we get it."

It's very similar to a lot of the things we talk about in this House, where they try to divide and conquer. They talk about, "We want to be partners and we want to collaborate," but every time they turn around, they take divisive policies.

Take the Aggregate Resources Act. Where do they think the gravel comes from for the concrete skyscrapers that they want to build in the great city of Toronto?

They talk about the Green Energy Act. What about local democracy, taking that ability from our local communities to have a say in where those wind turbines go? I'll guarantee you that, if we came down here from northern and rural Ontario and said that we want to plunk 2,000 of them in the downtown core of the GTA, that would be scrapped tomorrow, with no discussion, but they don't give us that same right.

The horse racing industry: I would love to know where the member from Peterborough is today. Are you for the horses or against the horses? We can't divide; we need to ensure that we're talking amongst ourselves for the way we're going to move forward as a great province.

The member from Peterborough talked way back into the 1980s. He can't get into the 2000s yet, but I'll drag him in. He talked about all the changes of Mike Harris. What about that gas tax for rural Ontario? Our member from Renfrew-Pickering—where is he from?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. Bill Walker:—Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has asked seven times in this House for the gas tax to be extended to rural Ontario. Who spends more money on gas than rural Ontarians? They vote it down every time, and John wins every time because of it.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's shameful.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's shameful; you're absolutely right. You know what?

Interjection.

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Mr. Bill Walker: Don't you talk "bankrupt" to us, Mr. Peterborough. A \$15.3-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt you're running up. You're dividing our province and running us into the ground.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. How long would you guys like to shout at each other?

Mr. Bill Walker: I reiterate. We need to ensure that we have policies that are going to ensure that rural and northern and our urban centres are working in collaboration. Farmers feed cities. Where do they think the food is coming from if we don't have a prosperous and vibrant rural and northern Ontario? We need our natural resources from the north and we need to ensure we're doing it in unison. We want to not just talk about collaboration and partnership; we're here to do the job.

My pal Mr. Pettapiece from Perth-Wellington is here putting a bill in front of us that we really need due diligence on. We need to speak with calm, civil voices and ensure we're working collaboratively. We need to ensure that we're working with each other, not dividing this great province of ours.

We have a great opportunity ahead of us. If that party would just start reaching out a little wee bit to rural Ontario, we'd have our—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. I've been very lenient all afternoon. The Speaker earlier today reminded members not to refer to people's names. It has already occurred four times this afternoon. I would remind all of you again: We're not supposed to use names; we're supposed to use riding names.

Further debate? The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Interjections.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Relax, relax. Let me just say that there's no redemption without confession. I want to offer that up right at the start. You have a history—we have a history, sadly; the other party opposite does. The single worst thing that ever happened to rural Ontario was when then-Premier Mike Harris reduced the number of seats in Ontario from 130 to 103.

Hon. James J. Bradley: And rural Ontario lost.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We lost all kinds of influence. Ever since we've come to government, you've tried to promulgate and perpetuate the convenient myth that this government doesn't care about rural Ontario. Well, I've got to tell you, you've left a lot of stuff out.

You haven't talked about our Open for Business initiative and the 28% reduction in rural and agricultural regulations. You haven't talked about the FIT review, which restored a lot of the power which AMO asked us not to leave with municipalities, by the way. You haven't talked about the rural economic development initiatives: some \$167 million for 418 projects generating over \$1.2 billion in new economic activity. You haven't talked about the 478 public infrastructure projects all across small towns in rural Ontario, or the \$550 million to build stronger and safer communities. We committed \$127 million to broadband services expanded in rural and urban communities, and created numerous jobs through all of those investments, I need to tell you.

Coming a little bit closer to home, let's go to Perth-Wellington. I just want to remind the member opposite of some of the ways our government has supported his little piece of rural Ontario. These are communities that have seen investments in health care, including hospital redevelopments—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: You're killing 13,000 horses.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I didn't interrupt you; please—including hospital redevelopments in Listowel and Stratford, a dialysis unit at the hospital in Palmerston, a new MRI scanner in Stratford, and plans to develop the hospital in Mount Forest.

You've also seen elementary schools in St. Marys, Harriston and Listowel, to say nothing about investments in junior kindergarten all through there.

You didn't talk about the five family health teams in Perth-Wellington or the Stratford General Hospital.

You didn't talk about a lot of the schools or community projects our government invested in: the Alma Community Hall, the Mount Forest Curling Club, the Mapleton playground, the Palmerston Lions park, the new Perth East Library, the Mitchell splash pad, the Mitchell Curling Club, the St. Marys accessible playground. You didn't talk about the Golden Valley Farms investment through AMIS or Erie Meats in Listowel. In fact, you left out a whole lot of stuff that was really important in your effort to denigrate the government and perpetuate the convenient myth you want to create there.

I want to say you'll be proud when you go back to your riding and talk to your local press about what you did, but take the Hansard with you so your people can read about what's really going on in rural Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Perth-Wellington, you have two minutes for reply.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Hasn't this been an interesting debate? It's just been incredible. I would like to first stand here and thank all the members who spoke to my motion. There were quite a few of them. I didn't realize we'd have this much participation, but it's been great.

What I want to say to the members opposite is, the next time we have a wind farm meeting, come on up. Come on up to those meetings. I'll let you know when it is. I've already invited some members of the governing party to come up and take part in these meetings and

justify what they're doing to rural Ontario. So please come on up to one of these meetings—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Or horse racing.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: —or the horse racing meetings. We're going to have one of them pretty soon. Come on up and justify that too.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Peterborough, would you come to order.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: The key to solving a problem is to recognize it. You have to recognize that there's a problem in rural Ontario, and you know this, Minister of Agriculture, you know this. I think we should thank Ernie Hardeman, the member from Oxford, for getting risk management going in the first place.

This debate is actually doing what I wanted it to do. It's getting people to think about what's going on in rural Ontario, which includes the north and the south. All communities in Ontario have to work together; urban and rural have to work together for a better province. But the policies put in place for the last eight years by this government are splitting us. They're splitting us up, so now we have this. I hear from people all the time saying, "What is going on in the GTA? There's got to be a wall there." The policies, the things that have happened in the last eight or nine years are not doing rural Ontario or urban Ontario any good so that we can have a joint and productive province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

PERFORMANCE PAY AND BONUSES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR ACT (MANAGEMENT AND EXCLUDED EMPLOYEES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LES PRIMES DE RENDEMENT ET AUTRES PRIMES DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC (CADRES ET EMPLOYÉS EXCLUS)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item 52, standing in the name of Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Bisson has moved second reading of Bill 118. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Estimates.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Estimates. Agreed? Agreed.

ORGAN OR TISSUE DONATION
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI A TRAIT AU DON
D'ORGANES OU DE TISSU

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Milligan has moved second reading of Bill 58. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

In my opinion, the motion carries.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Milligan.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer Bill 58 to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. Agreed? Agreed.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Pettapiece has moved private member's notice of motion number 24. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

In my opinion, the motion carries.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of the Environment has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed? Agreed.

The House is adjourned until Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1610.

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First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 10 September 2012

Lundi 10 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 10 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 10 septembre 2012

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is the tradition, during the time for introductions, that the Speaker be allowed the privilege of introducing former members.

In the members' west gallery today we have Mr. David Tsubouchi for Markham, who served in the 36th and 37th Parliaments. Welcome.

As an editorial, I used to get under his skin from time to time.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think I opened up a can of worms there.

The member from Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the fact that you introduced David Tsubouchi, but I also wanted to let you know that he's here to see his grandson, Ethan Seaver, who is a page here at Queen's Park.

David currently—I told him I wanted to mention this if I could—is the honorary consul general of the Republic of Mongolia. He was recently been appointed to that. Give him a hand for that.

Applause.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We're also blessed this morning to have in our presence Leonard Preyra, Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage from the great province of Nova Scotia, who is sitting in the gallery over here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to welcome, in the east gallery, Freshta Raoufi, a graduate of U of T with her B.A., who is now doing her Master's at the School of Public Policy and Governance at U of T and who is assisting us in our Ajax-Pickering office.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to welcome to Queen's Park the family of Jenna Rutherford, who is the page captain today. She has brought a big family who are all here from the great riding of Oxford. In the gallery are her parents, Mark and Carolyn Rutherford; her grandparents, Ralph and Irene Baker and John and Sandra Rutherford; and Jenna's brother, a former page, Kyle Rutherford. Also in the gallery are her aunt Julie, her cousin Liam McGregor and family friend Mark VandenBorre. I want to welcome them all to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I would invite members of the Legislative Assembly in joining me in welcoming a volunteer from my riding—an excellent friend, volunteer and intern as well—Dune Rabideau.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I guess I'm the only one who got the memo: It's "Bring your MP to work" day. I'd like to introduce Joe Preston, MP, Elgin—Middlesex—London.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Joe, I can't stand for those, but we're glad you're here with us.

The member from Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce a number of people from my riding of Halton: Christopher Wu, Iris Wu, Bagshe Wu, Alexandra Wu, Nathan Wu, Katarina Wu, Marion Wu, Michelle Clarke, Jaida Riley, Thanh To, Lyndsay Tran, Wyatt Darling and Madeleine Grand. They're all here, and they're the proud family of our lead page, Jacqueline Wu, who is serving from Halton. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, seven months ago you received the Drummond report, and for seven months it has basically sat on the shelf. Mr. Drummond pointed out some major failures of your local health integration networks: becoming increasingly bureaucratic, not coordinating care and failing to hit even on their most basic deliverables.

Premier, Don Drummond recommended action on two paths. Why have you refused to go down either path? Why are you treading water when it comes to improving coordination in our health care system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. First of all, Speaker, I want to welcome their new interest in health care in a substantive way. I can't recall the last time we had a question about a hospital, access to doctors, access to nurses, wait times, childhood obesity or the incidence of smoking from that caucus, so I'm interested in learning a little bit more.

I understand they put out a white paper today. I have not had the opportunity to look at that yet. I have not reviewed that, but I have reviewed their record. They closed hospitals. They fired nurses. When it came to fighting drug companies for lower costs, they chose the wrong side on the fight for lower-cost drugs in the province of Ontario. So I'll begin, Speaker, with an honest assessment of their record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, we have asked 50, 60, 100 questions on health care when it comes to the scandal at Ornge and the fact that taxpayers were ripped off and you looked the other way. Instead of investing money in patients and quality care, money went to well-connected Liberal friends, and the Premier still refuses to go before the committee to answer basic questions.

Premier, back to the issue at hand. Don Drummond actually recommended two paths. He recommended community hubs based around hospitals, or LHINs 2.0. It's time to choose a path. You've been paralyzed in place these last seven months. You refuse to make change while too often families in our health care system have to fight like hell to get things done, to get improvement for the patients. We're on the side of those families. We want to get behind them and coordinate care. We've chosen our path: community hubs.

Premier, will you make a decision or at least back our plan to get something done for patients in our health care system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

1040

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, like our Premier, I welcome a focus on health care, because it is not something we've seen from the opposition for a very long time.

I've had a chance only to review, at a pretty high level, the recommendations that are coming from the white paper. I can assure you that I will look very closely at this to see if there are any good ideas in there—any ideas we can adopt.

What I did notice is a significant similarity with some of the initiatives that are already under way. In fact, I brought a copy—maybe I could have a page come over—of our action plan for healthy change that I released many months ago in January, which does talk about some of the initiatives, including patient-based payments so hospitals get paid when they care for patients.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, it's a shame that whenever we mention the word "Ornge," the Premier seems to want to duck those questions. I will say to him again, I do hope that you show the same backbone that your Minister of Health, your former Minister of Health and other MPPs have shown. Show the backbone; actually show up at committee and answer questions from members of all three parties.

Let me point out to the Premier what has happened with your LHINs, the local health integration networks, these last six years. The Hamilton-area LHIN failed to meet 12 of its 14 basic targets in 2010. In five key categories—your own measurables—the LHIN's performance actually deteriorated from the previous year.

We believe you can't build excellence in the health care system on a foundation of weakness. Isn't a better idea to close down your LHINs, put money into patient care and have local, community-based decisions? Premier,

will you follow our plan in our white paper on patient-centred care and put patients, not bureaucrats, at the top of the pile?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I did have a chance to listen to the press conference for a few minutes, and I was a bit surprised that the member from Whitby—Oshawa wasn't there, but I suppose that's another issue.

What I can tell you, Speaker, is that much of what the Leader of the Opposition talked about could have been taken right out of speeches I have given: putting patients at the centre of care. That is why we are driving real change that is making a real difference for patients.

Thanks to the program called Homes First, people are now leaving hospital and returning home, when previously they would never have been able to go back home, because we're building supports around those people. They can wait at home for long-term care, if that's where they're going, or they can wait at home and get healthier and stronger and stay at home. This is the work that's under way. I'm so proud of our front-line staff—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to get back to the Premier on his drift in the last 10 months. His whole plan seemed to be to try to win a majority. He answers questions by saying—well, sometimes he tacks to the left, sometimes he tacks a little right, sometimes he hits the pause button. That sounds to me like somebody who doesn't have a plan, who doesn't know where he wants to go and is only concerned about his own job.

Premier, if you won't make the necessary changes, will you at least take the bold Conservative ideas to reform the health care system, get every bang for the dollar and create jobs in our economy?

Let me point this out: When you look at the LHINs and the CCACs, there are 2,000 people in bureaucratic positions, pushing paper from the inbox to the outbox every day. We want to close down those jobs and invest in nurses, personal support workers, physiotherapists and doctors. If you don't have a plan, will you take our plan to do exactly that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague. Again, I think it is both remarkable and noteworthy that there is an interest in health care coming from the official opposition, and I think it's important to begin with their record in government. They closed hospitals, they fired nurses, and when it came to our fight on behalf of Ontarians to lower drug costs, they chose the wrong side. They chose the wrong side.

I think it's also interesting, Speaker, if you get the opportunity to take a look at their white paper, that there are no specific commitments to enhancing home care hours, no specific commitments to increasing access to doctors, no reference to reducing the incidence of smoking, no

reference to tackling childhood obesity—nothing that is very, very patient-focused, which speaks in a real and meaningful way to Ontario families.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I have to offer you a little of my confusion. I'm trying to hear the question and the answer, and while the question is being put, I'm hearing noises from all sides, and when the answer is being put, I'm hearing noises from all sides. Bring it down.

Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: In his answer, Speaker, the Premier sadly makes my point for me. He seems to be stuck in time; he seems paralyzed to take action. We've seen 10 months of inaction, since the last election, when it comes to creating jobs. We've seen seven months of paralysis when it comes to implementing the Drummond report.

Do you know what the problem is? Patients are paying the price. We have women and men coming to our office in tears because they can't get their mom a spot in a long-term-care home. We have people coming to our office frustrated and at their wit's end because the home care promised for their mom, their dad, their loved one, gets cut off at the last minute. And where is it going? Thirty cents of every dollar in the CCACs is going to administration; up to 20% of beds in hospitals are for people who should be at home or in long-term care getting care; you have failed on 77% of your targets for LHINs.

Premier, that is a recipe for failure. It's time to take a different path. We have bold ideas for reform to help patients. Will you accept our plan, Premier, because you—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it looks to me like the only lesson the Leader of the Opposition learned from last Thursday's double loss was that they were to move further to the right. I don't think that's what the people of this province want when it comes to health care.

When he was in charge, he closed hospitals—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, their record speaks for itself. They closed hospitals. They fired 6,000 nurses. They had the worst surgical wait times. Hospital deficits were out of control with no plan to fix the problem. They didn't even bother to measure how long people were waiting for procedures because they, frankly, did not want to know the answer.

We've come a long way when it comes to providing better care for patients. We've got farther to go, but we've come a long, long way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem is the government continues to simply tinker. They want to put a fresh coat of paint on an old system. They seem to think that by

wishful thinking and little tweaks that they can turn a 1970s gas guzzler into a Prius. It's not going to work. It's time for fundamental reform. It's time to actually put patients at the centre of our health care system, not bureaucrats, to put decisions closer to people who depend on that care. It's time to fight for patients and their families because they're tired of fighting for themselves because they waste so much in health care and put the money into LHINs and CCACs. Let's clear it aside. Let's invest in patient care and more services for families.

If you're not going to lead, we will: bold Conservative ideas to create jobs, to grow our economy and put patients at the centre of our health care system. If you won't move, step aside, and put these ideas into place.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, the words might be bold, but the action certainly isn't. This plan is a pathway to nowhere.

I'll tell you what, Speaker. In our last budget, we took an important, strong and decisive step to actually enhance community care. We had to make some difficult decisions to hold hospitals to a 0% base increase, to hold the line on physician compensation, but we did that so we could invest more in home care. We're seeing the results of that now. ALC rates are dropping in our hospitals. People are getting the care they need at home. This is a good-news story. We welcome your support, but we would have also welcomed your support when you voted against increased home care in the last budget.

1050

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In last fall's election, the people of Ontario chose a minority Legislature, and since then the Premier has done almost everything he possibly can to change that outcome. He has offered appointments. He has made promises. He has even made a desperate attempt to create a crisis in our schools.

I think people have been pretty clear: Knock it off and actually get to work. Did the Premier get the message?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I don't see it that way. As a minority government, we were successful in moving ahead with our budget. We worked with the leader of the third party and her caucus. We made some significant amendments to our budget in order to secure, if not their support, their passive acquiescence.

With respect to putting our Putting Students First legislation forward, we are working with the official opposition. We made some changes there in order to accommodate some of their concerns. The fact of the matter is, we have and we will continue to find a way to move forward on behalf of Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people are worried about finding a job and a doctor, about making ends meet in very tough times, and they're tired of seeing their Premier scrambling to create a self-serving crisis.

Later today, the debate is going to conclude on a reckless and unconstitutional bill that's going to cost Ontario families hundreds of millions of dollars a few years down the road. Is the Premier still going to plow ahead with this reckless plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I welcome the question, Speaker, and the opportunity to engage in this debate, but I really would encourage my honourable colleague, if not to read the actual decisions offered by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Ontario Court of Appeal, at least read some of the summations and some of the interpretations offered by objective, independent third parties in this matter.

We are being very careful in terms of respecting the law. We are being determined in our effort to collectively bargain as much as we can. But as we said in the context of our budget several months ago, if we cannot obtain a result through collective bargaining that achieves our fiscal results, then we will not hesitate to act, because we believe that's in the public interest.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what people want is leadership that delivers for them, and when they look at this government, they see a gang that's more interested in power for themselves. They spent millions and millions of dollars cancelling private power plants after they themselves signed the deal. They're ready to spend countless and countless millions more on a reckless bill that's headed for the courts after they themselves warned that it was simplistic and unconstitutional.

Is the Premier ready to stop the cynical politics and start tackling the challenges that people actually sent him here to deal with?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to draw my honourable colleague's attention to a \$15-billion deficit. On behalf of Ontarians—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. As a reminder to all, I have already started to mention individuals by riding. I will continue that trend.

Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not my turn anymore. It's the Premier's turn.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank you, Speaker.

It's good to know there remains a weak—but there's a pulse there, nonetheless, in the official opposition. I'm glad to hear that they're awake for this.

Again to return to my honourable colleague, the leader of the NDP, there is this matter of a significant deficit, and I think she owes it to Ontarians to specifically tell us what her plan is to eliminate that deficit, and understanding that more than one half of the money we spend in provincial government goes into compensation to our

public sector partners. We can't afford to give our partners a wage hike at this point in time. On this matter, she and I differ, but I would argue she owes many more specifics to Ontarians on this subject.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. One of the main challenges that people sent us here to address is the lack of good jobs in this province. On Friday, we learned that Ontario lost another 25,000 jobs last month. Most of those jobs were full-time, Speaker. And our unemployment rate continues to sit above the national average.

Is the Premier ready to try some different ideas, some new ideas, to get people back to work, or is he going to be doing the same old things using the same old solutions that simply have not been working for Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is indeed a very important issue and I'm glad my honourable colleague has brought this to the fore here today and now. I think it's important to maintain some perspective. In the US, they have recovered 45% of their jobs lost. In the UK, they have recovered 71% of their jobs lost. But here in Ontario, we've recovered 130% of our jobs lost.

In June, our economy created about 20,000 jobs. In July, it created about 10,000 jobs. August was not a good month; I acknowledge that. But the trend line is positive, and since the recession, Ontario has created 325,000 new jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fact is, Speaker, there are still hundreds of thousands of people out of work in this province. The Premier actually made a promise, and he may recall it. He made a promise that corporate tax cuts were going to create all kinds of jobs, but instead, that's not happening. The money is being used by the corporations to do things like pay their CEOs more. They're sitting on hoards and hoards of cash that the Liberals gave them in corporate tax cuts.

The Bank of Canada governor, Mark Carney, has said that Canadian companies are sitting on dead money, and that dead money is worth about \$526 billion. We can complain about this, Speaker, or we can actually do a better job of creating jobs. Does the Premier agree that it's time to look at new ways to work with businesses to create jobs for the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's noteworthy that we hear from the official opposition and how they like to engage in union-bashing. Now we hear from the leader of the NDP and how she likes to engage in business-bashing.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We think we have a responsibility to work with business and to work with labour.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's the foundation of growth and prosperity, this old-fashioned idea of understanding we're all in this together.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew will come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: And the best way for us to continue to move forward is by working together. I'll remind my honourable colleague, there's something that she can do—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time for the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —in order to help us create more jobs. We have a specific bill. It's the healthy home renovation tax credit, Speaker. It will support \$800 million in home renovation activity on an annual basis and create 10,500 new jobs every year. That's a bill before this House right now. If she's interested in jobs, she can support our bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what I'm bashing is a government that recklessly cuts corporate taxes year after year without creating any jobs for people in this province. Now, we put forward one practical idea that actually could make a big difference. Instead of handing out tax giveaways to companies, even when they fire people, let's reward the companies that are actually prepared to create jobs. A job creation tax credit is a very simple and effective way to reward the companies that are ready to put people to work in this province.

Later today, the Premier is going to be meeting with the Jobs and Prosperity Council. Will he ensure that the job creation tax credit is actually on the agenda? Is he ready to move forward with an effective plan to actually create jobs for the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll remind my honourable colleague that the proposal put forward by her party in this matter, the job creator tax credit, is something that remains the subject of active consideration by the Jobs and Prosperity Council, and she's aware of that.

But I also want to remind her of her support for our budget, which provides for an investment in infrastructure of \$35 billion over three years. It creates over 100,000 jobs every year. If you take a look around this province today, we are building and renewing schools and hospitals, roads and bridges and public transit, creating thousands of jobs across the province.

Today, we made an announcement with respect to the Pan Am Games. We're going to be building the Markham Pan Am sports centre and the University of Toronto field hockey centre. We're expanding the Etobicoke Olympium, all with a view to creating thousands and thousands of jobs for Ontario.

1100

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Health. Under the McGuinty Liberals, patients and taxpayers have seen Ontario's health care bureaucracy balloon over a long, dark decade of Liberal mismanagement. Patients and taxpayers are paying the price for a poorly built, ill-conceived system of layers upon layers of office workers that do nothing to improve access for patients.

The OECD says that if Canada's health system was as efficient as some of the best-performing European systems, Canadians could save as much as 2.5% of the GDP on our health care. In Ontario alone that amounts to \$13.4 billion which could be directed to front-line patient care. Don't take my word for it, Minister; that number was confirmed by Don Drummond, your very own hand-picked economist whose report the Liberals have ignored.

Minister, rather than wasting more money on eHealth, Ornge scandals and layers of bureaucracy, why don't you accept our new bold vision, scrap the health care bureaucracy—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. A reminder for all members: When I stand, you sit.

Minister of Health?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, it's great to have a new health critic. I'm not quite sure what happened to the old one, but it's great to have a new one.

What I can tell you is that I have not yet had a chance to look in depth at the PC proposal. If, in fact, there are some nuggets of good ideas in there, we will, of course, take them very seriously. What I can tell you, though, is that when that party was in power—the party that actually created CCACs, lest we forget, Speaker—they also saw runaway hospital deficits. Those deficits are now under control. In fact, all of our hospitals across this province, thanks to the good work of the LHINs, are either in balance or are on a path to get to balance, Speaker. That's extraordinary progress.

We want every possible dollar to go to front-line care. That's why we're taking the steps that we are.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Speaker, my question is back to the health minister. We need a new health minister. You can quote your facts all you like till you're red in the face; the bottom line is that you know, the Premier knows and Ontarians know that LHINs haven't improved health system performance in Ontario at all. You want a statistic? You're proud of the LHINs? You missed 77% of your government's own health care targets. You wouldn't get an F, you'd get a T for "terrible."

Minister, you've failed. You've failed from Ornge to eHealth part 2 to a 77% key-performance-indicator failure. Under your watch, provincial wait times, emergency

hospital care, long-term care and home care remain stagnant or worse under your LHINs.

Do us all a favour: Admit you cannot manage your ministry, admit you need a new direction, take our ideas in our new white paper, implement them, and for once put patients ahead of your bureaucracy and your needs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. This is my last warning for individuals who are heckling while the question is being asked from the same side—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We're just cheering, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —as well as any comments being made while I'm speaking. I would ask that you bring this down. I continue to mention individuals by riding. I will now move to the warning stage, and after that, you're out.

Minister?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All that noise is not necessary.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I just want to remind the member opposite that an increase in volume does not compensate for a deficit in ideas. However, Speaker, I think what matters to the patients in this province is, are they getting better care now than they were when we took office in 2003? Well, 2.1 million more Ontarians now have a family doctor than when we took office. We've opened up nurse-practitioner-led clinics, a model that health ministers from across the country are watching very, very closely. We've gone from the lowest adoption of electronic medical records to the best in the country. Our wait times were the worst in the country, and now they are the shortest in the country.

We've made tremendous progress and we are accelerating that progress by investing more in home care, more in community care and driving the best value for every dollar that we spend.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, the Erie St. Clair Community Care Access Centre is facing a \$10-million deficit and is considering deep cuts to service. The minister proposed a 4% increase to the community care sector in the last budget, but that line has gone silent since then. More than six months into the fiscal year, this CCAC is trying to provide services without knowing how much money they're working with. It's completely outrageous. Can the minister tell the CCAC whether the promised 4% increase is still coming?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Make no mistake about it: Our priority as a government in our health care system is to invest more in community care, more in home care. While each LHIN is allocating strategically where that funding will go, I can assure you that funding for com-

munity care is up by 60%. More people are getting the home care they need because our system benefits—the more people who are getting home care instead of care in hospital, the happier they are and the better off the system is. We are determined to continue to invest more in home and community care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings will come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The Erie St. Clair CCAC is warning that cuts to the community sector will not only impact its clients but will also have a serious effect on local hospitals. The CCAC is doing all that they can to not have an acute impact on the community, but they can only do so much. If the minister's promise to strengthen the community sector is no longer on the table, will she at least have the decency to come clean and admit that her government's priorities have changed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our priority to invest more in community is stronger than it has ever been before because we're seeing demonstrated results from those investments. I'm happy that the third party supports this move, this rebalancing of our health care expenditure. I sure do wish the opposition party did the same. I sure do wish that rather than speak loudly about things that we're not doing right, they would actually have supported our budget that begins a very important transformation of our health care system. When people need to be in hospital that's where they should be. But if they don't need to be in hospital, let's move the resources to give them the care they need where they want to be, in their own home.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As the population continues to age, our health care system is dealing with a demographic challenge as well as a fiscal one. Our hospitals, now more than ever, are dealing with these issues. Specifically, there are many individuals in my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt who are staying in hospital beds who ought not to be there. Other health care settings, like home care and long-term care, are exactly what they need.

Focusing on home care and long-term care has many benefits. It reduces ER wait times, frees up hospital beds, and also provides the care to people they need closer to home. Through you, Speaker, to the minister, what are hospitals doing to address this challenge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member from Scarborough-Agincourt for that very thoughtful and important question. This is a challenge that I know hospitals are dealing with, but they cannot solve this problem alone. It must be done in partnership with others in the health care sector, particularly the community and home care sectors. Hospitals cannot do it alone.

Our action plan lays out a pathway where we can work in partnership—government, hospitals, the entire health care system—to get people the care they need. Let me give you an example of where it's working. London Health Sciences Centre in my community has been working with the CCAC and community partners to free up hospital beds and make sure that patients get the care they need at home whenever possible. This is where Home First comes in. Home First focuses on discharging elderly patients to their own homes after an acute episode in hospital, rather than assuming long-term care is the only option. We've seen a reduction of 66% in the percentage of ALC patients waiting for long-term care—in the month of August, zero patients in hospital waiting for long-term care—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

1110

Ms. Soo Wong: These are very positive steps which are helping us to deal with the demographic challenges we face. We need all the health care partners working together to do what's right for our patients.

We know that in order to provide the type of care that is right for each community, we need to focus on local decision-making power. At the same time, there are significant financial challenges that our health care providers at all levels continue to struggle with. Despite the provincial fiscal reality, we must ensure that Ontarians have access to the health care services they need.

Speaker, these are the questions that need to be asked, and in the absence of questions from the opposition, I would like to ask, through you to the minister, how will the government provide care to Ontarians while recognizing the fiscal reality?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the member is very correct. This is a challenge that can be addressed only through a very ambitious plan, and that is why we released our action plan in January.

Part of our action plan is our seniors' care strategy. Dr. Samir Sinha is our expert lead. He's travelling the province listening to front-line providers, listening to caregivers and listening to seniors and developing a plan which he will have for me this fall to ensure that people, particularly our seniors, get the right care at the right place in the right time.

That is right for them, Speaker, but it's also right for the system. Staying in a hospital can cost up to \$1,000 a day. Long-term care is \$150 a day. Home care is a fraction of that. So by providing people the right care at home, we're not only doing what they want, which is to be in their own home, but it's also the right thing to do for our system.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier. The McGuinty government has a lot of sins to account for, not the least of which are record deficits, staggering debt, out-of-control spending on government salaries and

your abhorrent record on job creation. You've done nothing to get Ontario moving in the right direction. You procrastinated on the budget, then watered it down. Then you held your breath, hoping for the by-elections to hand you a majority.

Now that the dust has settled, are you waiting for another downgrade from Moody's and S&P before you get your act together? And stop playing "Fun with figures" in your answer. How long do people have to wait? Explain yourself, Premier: Tell Ontarians what you're waiting for.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we've implemented a budget plan that is bringing Ontario back to balance. Like jurisdictions across this country and around the western world, we were hit hard by the downturn of 2008-09. Unlike a number of those jurisdictions the Premier cited earlier, more jobs have been created since the downturn than existed before the downturn. That's better than the US, better than the UK. Just this morning, RBC is out saying that Ontario's growth will once again lead Canada this year, which I think is important.

I'll have more to say at public accounts in the very near future about our achievements to date, but we are continuing to bring down the deficit while we protect the important investments we've made in education and health, which are essential to a better economic future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaker, the truth is that this Premier, this finance minister and this government are failing Ontario. You want to stay the course, is what you say. But Minister, you're the first mate aboard the Titanic. You've had nine years to get it together. You've quite frankly flopped.

The latest job numbers show that you're not just preventing the province from moving forward; you're actually dragging it down. Your excuses are all out the window at this point. The by-elections are done. The teachers' legislation is done. It's clear that you still do not have a plan.

Since you haven't got any ideas on how to get Ontario out of the hole your government has dug, why don't you listen to someone who does? Why are you not listening to us?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I do listen to a number of people. By the way, we are quite willing to take good ideas from either of the opposition parties, and we've done that. We'll continue to do that.

Today, RBC is out saying, "Still, at a time when we expect the pace of national growth to slow this year relative to last year, the ... acceleration of provincial economic activity is encouraging."

I'll remind him of what the National Bank had to say: "Business spending for machinery and equipment will continue to grow over the forecast horizon, which is worth mentioning after growth rates of 15% in 2010 and close to 20% in 2011"

There's no doubt that too many Ontarians are still looking for jobs. That's why we have our healthy homes tax credit, which he and his party have blocked—10,500 jobs. Please, let that pass. It's part of our plan, which is getting us back to balance as we protect the enormous gains we've made in education and health care, which are essential for a bright and growing economic future for all—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Minister of Consumer Services. Mr. Speaker, in May I introduced Bill 98 to stop large companies from charging unfair international money transfer fees. Now we have learned that the two biggest money transfer companies operating in Canada, MoneyGram and Western Union, have registered to lobby both the Ministry of Consumer Services and the Ministry of Finance on this bill.

Has the minister met with these advocates for these powerful companies, and what are they saying to her?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member for the question. Certainly, consumer protection is an important issue for our government, and we are reviewing the bill that the member has put forward. As always, we're reviewing this bill with a view to improving consumer protection in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note as well that the federal government has a role to play in protecting consumers with regard to federally regulated financial services.

The ministry continues to analyze the bill, and we continue to look at options to improve consumer protection for Ontario consumers with regard to remittance fees. This is an issue which certainly impacts a great number of people in the province of Ontario, including myself and many of us in this Legislature—I would no doubt think that—and it's an issue that also impacts many people who are new Canadians. So this is an issue which we find very important to us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again to the Minister of Consumer Services: When Ontarians send their hard-earned money to relatives overseas, multinational companies should not be allowed to siphon off as much as they please. Powerful US-based companies are now fighting against a bill that would protect Ontarians.

Ontarians need to know, will the minister take action to protect Ontarians from predatory money transfer companies, or will she capitulate to the high-paid lobbyists for these US companies?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like the member opposite to know that this is an issue on which we continue to listen to all the interested parties, all the interested stakeholders, and certainly our consumers in the province of Ontario.

This issue, as I said, is a very complicated issue. There are many complicated factors that require a very thor-

ough review of the bill. Because of the complex nature of this issue, we continue to review this bill carefully, the proposed legislation that has been put forward by the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to look at other ways to protect consumers in the province of Ontario, which is an issue which is very important to me and to our government.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, my question this morning is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, I've toured many farms in Peterborough county and other areas of Ontario that are experiencing dry, hot weather over this growing season, which has impacted this year's corn crop. The weather has also had a great impact on the growth and availability of forages for the feeding of livestock.

While some of the corn was affected by the dry weather, the yield may have been impacted to such an extent that farmers are looking to harvest the damaged corn as silage to feed their own livestock or to sell as forage to livestock producers.

The coverage these producers have under the government's Production Insurance program will impact this decision. Can the minister please inform this House of how Agricorp, which administers the Production Insurance program, is assisting farmers with options for harvesting damaged or stressed corn to be used as silage?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I thank the member from Peterborough for the question. All summer I've been hearing from farmers about the impact weather has had on them and their operations. I want to emphasize that harvesting decisions are, of course, left to the producers.

Farmers with production insurance who are interested in harvesting damaged corn as silage should contact Agricorp to file a damage report. Once filed, an inspector will be out within 48 hours to do an assessment. Once that assessment is done and the damage is anticipated, arrangements can be made to facilitate the request of the farmers.

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OMAFRA also has a number of other resources as relates to other crops. The best advice is to contact Agricorp directly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister, for that superb answer. I think farmers in my riding will be pleased to know that OMAFRA and Agricorp are working to ensure that they have timely access to information that they need to make sound business decisions about their crops. These farmers and farmers right across Ontario take the risk of uncontrollable weather every day. It's a tough job and they do it very well.

I'm hearing from farmers in Peterborough county and from all over the province about their concerns over the effects of the hot, dry conditions we've experienced over the summer. Minister—through you again, Mr. Speak-

er—what other actions will your ministry be taking to assist farmers with the challenging weather?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Speaker, it is a tough profession, and there have been some real challenges this summer. The member may well remember that earlier this summer our government asked the federal government to work with us to initiate an AgriRecovery file as a result of the dry weather. While the AgriRecovery assessment is ongoing, interim payments under both Agri-Stability and production insurance are available to producers who are experiencing distress.

We are pleased—I want to repeat “pleased”—that the federal government has accelerated tax relief for livestock producers through the identification of the prescribed drought regions as we requested in early August. This is certainly going to help in future tax years, and it’s going to put money into the pockets of the producers who need it now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. Last week, Ontario’s job numbers were released. What was revealed by these numbers is that under your leadership, Premier, Ontario is still on the wrong path, a path that only leads to more debt and more unemployment. In August, 33,200 jobs were added to the public sector while 57,000 people lost work in the private and self-employed sector.

Premier, these numbers don’t lie. You would think that after being in government for nine years, you would have figured out how to create an atmosphere for jobs to be created in the province of Ontario. Instead, you create a new committee to tell you how to create jobs and new government programs to try and spend your way to prosperity. It is clear that the only way this Premier creates jobs is by making government bigger.

Premier, can you tell the people of Ontario why 300,000 more people have been hired in the public sector since you have been elected and why you, sir, are so determined to bankrupt the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, there comes a time when the opposition has to move away from slamming those who are working so hard to build our economy and recognize the progress that’s being made.

The fact of the matter is—and it is a fact—we’ve created 325,000 net new jobs since the recession. The fact of the matter is, we’re up at around 130% in job creation compared to 45% in the US and 71% in the UK. No matter how you slice that, that’s job growth. Our economy is growing.

Just look at what the finance minister shared with us earlier: Royal Bank disagrees with you. RBC predicts that the provincial economy will grow by 2.2% next year. That’s higher than the national average.

We’re on the right track. There’s more work to be done, but rather than slamming those working so hard to build the economy, he should start trying to work in partnership with them, like we are, to create jobs and create a stronger economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: Premier, I’ve always been taught to leave things better off than when you found it. I look at my nieces and I look at my nephew and younger Ontarians and believe it’s our duty to make things better for the next generation. You got this province when it was prosperous, Premier, and now you’re leaving it a disaster.

Ontario has the highest debt in history and the highest unemployment in the country. It’s a choice between bankruptcy and prosperity. Tim Hudak and the PC caucus aren’t going to allow you to bankrupt this province. We’re going to fight for jobs, fight for balanced budgets and fight for the next generation.

Premier, why are you standing idly by, watching Ontario fall behind? Why are you growing the public sector and the size of government as the private sector loses thousands and thousands of jobs?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, it’s time that the opposition started dealing with the facts, and the facts are these: The current size of the OPS is 14% below 1995 levels. It’s lower than it was back then. You ought to start dealing with the facts: 325,000 jobs of net growth is growth. It’s a sign of a growing economy.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll tell you what they could have done. If the opposition really cared about jobs in this province, they should have supported our southwest Ontario development fund in the member’s very own riding. They should have supported our eastern Ontario development fund; they didn’t. Worse than that, they deliberately delayed it. Worse than that now, their members are writing intimidating letters to local councils.

So I say to the Leader of the Opposition, call off your members. Stop that intimidating letter-writing campaign that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Brad Duguid:—tell Trent Hills council that you respect their view, their voice—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Brad Duguid:—and that they have a right to support those programs that are creating jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

CASINOS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Talks are currently under way between the city of Hamilton and OLG officials regarding a casino in Hamilton. But instead of having an open and public conversa-

tion, talks have been taking place behind closed doors. That's not how Hamiltonians like to have things done. Will this government direct OLG officials to discontinue any further meetings with city officials until a referendum has been held and the voices of the people of Hamilton have actually been heard?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The OLG has set up a system of reviewing the various casinos throughout the province and venues for gaming opportunities. There are a number of zones in the province. Nothing will proceed in an area, in a municipality, in a region where it is not welcome.

I look forward to those discussions continuing on. I know that we all look forward to the input of the people of the region into these important decisions as we move forward to make OLG a stronger company with safer and better returns to the taxpayers of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the minister knows very well that the timelines have been put in place, such that the OLG is now putting the squeeze on communities within those zones to make very, very speedy decisions.

A transparent process, including a city-wide referendum, is the best way forward, and it's the very least that the people of Hamilton deserve. The impact of a casino on traffic, noise, other local businesses, must be taken into account, and local residents must be contacted and consulted. Will this government order OLG to stop their discussions with Hamilton officials until after the people of Hamilton have had their say?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I have great confidence in local processes and local decision-making, particularly in that great city of Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, it was that leader and her party that brought casino gambling to Ontario. I recall my community was the first host of a casino. They did not require a referendum of our people in Windsor. The local council of the day put it on the ballot. I was a member of that council. It was a sounding board. I'd invite you to look at that, Mr. Speaker.

I have great faith in our local municipalities to make the right choices for the people in their communities, and I'm confident that the people of Hamilton and their elected officials locally will make the right choice for their community.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. Phil McNeely: Ma question est pour la ministre de l'Éducation. Madame la Ministre, une éducation de qualité est très importante pour mes commettants d'Ottawa-Orléans. Ils sont heureux de voir que notre gouvernement donne la priorité aux élèves et protège la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants à temps plein.

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Comme vous le savez bien, certaines écoles francophones avaient, elles, déjà la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants à temps plein depuis de nombreuses années. Je suis fier de voir notre communauté francophone être innovatrice de la sorte.

Madame la Ministre, pouvez-vous nous en dire plus sur les investissements de notre gouvernement dans l'éducation en français?

L'hon. Laurel C. Broten: Merci au député d'Ottawa-Orléans pour sa question. Quel plaisir de pouvoir répondre en français aujourd'hui.

En effet, ce sont les écoles francophones de l'Ontario qui, depuis longtemps déjà, ont reconnu tous les avantages de la maternelle et du jardin d'enfants à temps plein, et grâce à leurs idées innovatrices, on a appris beaucoup et on a mis en place un programme d'apprentissage, PAJO. Cet automne, 120 000 enfants à travers l'Ontario seront inscrits à la maternelle et au jardin d'enfants à temps plein.

Notre système scolaire français nous tient à coeur, et sous notre gouvernement McGuinty, nous avons augmenté le financement destiné à l'éducation francophone de près de 80 %, avec un financement de 1,3 million de dollars cette année. Je suis très contente de pouvoir demander le support et démontrer le support de notre gouvernement envers l'éducation en français.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci. Supplémentaire.

M. Phil McNeely: Merci, madame la Ministre. Je suis très fier de savoir que notre gouvernement soutient les francophones, et surtout du fait que le jardin d'enfants et la maternelle à temps plein est une innovation de nos écoles francophones.

J'aimerais poser ma question supplémentaire à la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Madame la Ministre, je sais que vous êtes très impliquée dans notre communauté franco-ontarienne. Pouvez-vous voir sur le terrain des résultats concrets de tous nos investissements en éducation dans notre communauté?

L'hon. Laurel C. Broten: À la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier le député d'Ottawa-Orléans, qui est un fier défenseur des droits des francophones.

Oui, sur le champ, on voit des résultats. Nous savons, entre autres, que nos jeunes étudiants au niveau élémentaire, surtout en troisième et sixième année, surpassent les normes provinciales en mathématiques, lecture et écriture. Ça se traduit au niveau universitaire, puisque les Franco-Ontariens ont un taux de graduation plus élevé que le reste de la province, qui surpasse même nos confrères québécois. Vous savez, 25 % de la population francophone en Ontario a moins de 25 ans. Pour nous, cela veut dire que pour renforcer le sens identitaire de notre communauté, l'éducation est, et doit demeurer, une priorité. Nous sommes fiers de nos investissements et, bien sûr, du programme de la maternelle et du jardin d'enfants à temps plein.

Et je dois vous dire aussi qu'il y a une autre initiative. C'est Petits pas à trois dans ma circonscription, où les enfants de trois ans commencent l'école. Alors, on va voir les résultats.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Minister of Education: Last week at committee, all opposition amendments to protect management rights for school boards and principals were defeated. As a result, school boards throughout Ontario are concerned that directives not contained within Bill 115 but within the OECTA MOU will be forced upon them.

Minister, I'm asking you today to clarify, is it your intention to force all school boards, including those that did not sign the OECTA MOU in the Catholic, French and public systems, to adhere to this memorandum that usurps their authority as democratically elected entities?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As the member opposite would know, at the time of introduction of this piece of legislation, of Putting Students First, we brought forward a piece of legislation in draft form and then we brought an amendment to recognize the issues that had been raised by the opposition.

That being said, we've been clear and consistent since the beginning of this process. On August 10, I wrote to trustees across the province to indicate clearly that under the Education Act, which is obviously the governing act for education, we would be putting forward a regulation to speak to the issues of fair and transparent hiring practices that do need to happen across the province, and that under the Education Act we would be releasing a PPM document that had—had conversations last fall, and that we would look to ensure that diagnostic testing is also clear and consistent under the authorities under the Education Act. Obviously, Putting Students First speaks to that within one context, but we will also look to ensure that we have processes right across the entire province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, this "My way or the highway" routine has got to stop. It's really unbecoming of them in a minority government. I need to remind the minister: On two occasions in this last 12 months, Ontario voters rejected giving that government a majority to do whatever they wanted to everyone in this province.

I'm going to ask again, given that only one Catholic board signed on to the MOU, because you took them over, and only four more Catholic boards signed on because they only endorsed it—God knows what they received, Speaker—we want to know from the Minister of Education, is she prepared to clarify today whether or not the boards that did not sign on to that MOU are bound to that OECTA agreement, yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Education?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Mr. Speaker, the one issue that is absolutely clear in this Legislature is that it is we, on this side of the House, who stand for fair and transparent hiring practices. Every single Ontarian knows a young teacher who wants nothing more than to stand in front of a classroom, and there are boards across this province that do not even post available jobs.

So on this side of the House, we support fairness and open and transparent hiring practices. We believe in that initiative, Speaker, and we will make sure that that takes place right across the province. It should not be who you know that helps you get a job to teach our kids; it should be what you know. That's what we believe in on this side of the House.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour la ministre de l'Éducation. Les parents qui veulent admettre un de leurs enfants dans un programme d'immersion font face à des barrières. J'aimerais demander à M^{me} la Ministre pourquoi une femme d'Ottawa, M^{me} Mikeala Read, est incapable d'admettre sa petite fille dans un programme d'immersion en première année parce qu'elle n'a pas été capable de l'admettre dans un programme de garderie dans cette école. La fille de M^{me} Read est en première année. Pourquoi est-ce qu'en première année, le gouvernement ne s'assure pas que tous les enfants puissent aller à l'école d'immersion s'ils le désirent?

L'hon. Laurel C. Broten: Comme j'ai eu la chance de dire auparavant, monsieur le Président, on est très fier des investissements qu'on a mis dans le domaine de l'éducation en français, où les investissements ont eu une augmentation d'à peu près 80 %.

Les détails de la question que vous me demandez, je ne les ai pas. Alors, j'aurais l'opportunité peut-être d'avoir plus de détails.

Mais ce que je veux dire c'est que les décisions locales, ce sont des décisions des conseils dans la région d'Ottawa. Alors, en première place, la mère dont la membre parle devrait demander au conseil scolaire dans sa région pour avoir de l'aide. Mais s'il y a une façon où on peut faire quelque chose de la part de la province—ce que je ne pense pas qu'on va pouvoir faire—je vais te demander les détails, et on va pouvoir en discuter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I was on a walk outside this afternoon, in front of Queen's Park on a beautiful day, and I ran into a new friend: Henning Askholm, who's here from Frederikssund, Denmark. He's here with a delegation of trade unionists, members from 3F, to study our labour system and immigration issues in Ontario, and I'm pleased to welcome him to the Ontario Legislature today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome all our guests.

Further introductions? The member from Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, you still remember. Thank you.

It's my pleasure to introduce today, from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Harvey Bischof, Earl Burt, Scott Marshall, Cindy Dubu  and Leslie Wolfe. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

With the indulgence of the House, it is my intention to introduce our new crop of interns, who have not arrived as of yet. So I will reserve that when they do arrive, if I can have an agreement. Thank you. I appreciate it.

The member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: I would like to introduce—I don't think he's here yet—Greg Weiler, the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario housed in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga. He will be here later to, I'm sure, take in the proceedings, and I'll have an opportunity to meet with him then. So I'd like to welcome Greg, if he's not already here, to the Ontario Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Last Friday, a large group of local horse owners, breeders, trainers and other employees gathered in my riding to voice their concerns about the imminent destruction of the entire horse industry in this province. Without exception, they talked about the loss of income they and their colleagues have already suffered, and they predicted even more bleak days ahead for the 60,000 employees in that important agricultural industry.

The government is giving up \$1.1 billion in revenue from the slots-at-racetracks partnership, and in its place they have proposed a very dicey arrangement for bingo halls and for possible casinos.

Through months of anxiety, frustration and heartache, the Premier has refused to meet with representatives of the horse industry. The revenue at the fall thoroughbred sales, last week, was down 36% from the same sale last year, and the price drop at the standardbred sales is expected to be much greater.

My riding has seen horse breeders dispose of their entire herds and sell their farms. We've seen other farms kill off all their horses because they see no future for yearlings and no future in the business for their own children.

What has rural Ontario ever done to you, Mr. Premier, to deserve such unbridled hatred and contempt, that you would actually kill 60,000 jobs and 13,000 horses just to be able to say you cancelled the program that was set up by the last PC government?

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: We've been getting complaints in our offices from people like Richard Macdonald from

Temiskaming Shores, who have written to the Premier regarding his decision to break his promise and try to privatize the ONTC and shut down our passenger train service. Since they have not gotten any replies, quite a few people are wondering if he even gets to see the letters that they are taking the time to write, or if he even cares.

I have a postcard that many northerners have sent to the Premier and I would like to take this opportunity to read it into the record.

"Mr. Premier,

"Having a wonderful time in northeastern Ontario; wish you were here. I am completely dumbfounded at your government's decision to cancel the Northlander train on September 28, 2012. Northern Ontario has some of the harshest weather in Canada, and with single-lane highways that are closed on a weekly basis either for accidents or weather conditions, we require alternate transportation, and the Northlander has served us well. Would you please reverse the decision made by the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and continue the Northlander train service? The ONTC is a vital and essential service that has become the economic engine to create and sustain economic growth in northern Ontario.

"Mr. Premier, in 2003, you pledged not to sell the ONTC. Please honour your pledge. Thank you, an Ontario taxpayer."

This one is signed by Alicia Nelson from Cochrane. I would like to give this and the hundreds of other cards I have to a page to give to the Premier to ensure that these people receive a reply.

YORK SUBWAY EXTENSION

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I'm pleased to stand today and discuss the Toronto-York Spadina subway extension, a project that will greatly benefit my riding of York Centre and commuters across the GTA.

Since 2006, our government has invested \$870 million to support the extension of the Spadina subway line from Downsview Station to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre at Highway 7 in York region. The project is expected to create 20,000 jobs and, upon completion, is expected to eliminate 30 million polluting car trips each year, boosting our economy, easing traffic congestion and improving air quality.

Construction is well under way. All four tunnel boring machines are in the ground, digging both the southern and northern tunnels. I am pleased to say that all six station contracts have been awarded and station construction is also under way.

This landmark initiative will help extend subway service for the first time beyond the regional boundaries in the 416 to the 905 region, making public transit more convenient for everyone in the GTA.

This is just one more example of the McGuinty government's record investments in public transit in the GTA, including \$8.4 billion for four Toronto LRT lines

and the air-rail link service between Canada's busiest transportation hubs, Union Station and Pearson airport. In fact, since 2003 our government has invested more than \$13.4 billion in public transit across the province of Ontario.

VERNON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: In 1912, 11 women from the village of Vernon and the surrounding area rode horse and buggy or walked to the Orange Hall to organize the Vernon chapter of the Women's Institute.

One hundred years ago, Adelaide Hoodless and Erland Lee were determined to make life better in our community. While the century after them would bring great change, over the last 100 years, that noble goal has remained and it lives on with the Vernon Women's Institute members of today.

Over the years, the members of the Vernon Women's Institute gave generously of their "time, talent and money," as Mrs. Rolla Campbell said in their 1962 meeting. They supported both World Wars and the Great Depression. In later years, the women's institute brought concrete sidewalks to the village; established a library; ensured safer streets by purchasing lighting; they helped mark the Springhill Cemetery with signs; and they built a post office in the village. Over all this time, they've even sponsored an underprivileged child in the Far East.

Today, over 100 years later, the Vernon Women's Institute boasts 20 members who support local agricultural fairs, the 4-H, our hospital in Winchester and our care centre in Osgoode.

These are great women doing great things, Speaker, and on behalf of the Ontario Legislature I want to thank them and wish them a happy 100th.

CITY OF WINDSOR

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I rise today to share some news with my colleagues in this House which was released recently by Reader's Digest.

As the proud member of provincial Parliament for the riding of Windsor West, I was delighted to hear that Reader's Digest has named my hometown of Windsor the fifth-best city in Canada to raise a family.

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As someone who was born and raised in Windsor and who has been blessed to have the opportunity to raise a family of her own, I couldn't agree more with this very humbling article. Speaker, if I may, I know my friends here and everyone from our area can attest to this as well.

As Reader's Digest points out, for day-to-day parenting, it's the little things that count. With that in mind, they ranked Canada's provincial capitals and cities with a population of over 80,000 people into 11 categories. They looked at characteristics such as median age, day-care, cost of food, parenting groups, and park space—those elements of a community that make it friendly, welcoming and great for families. Windsor was ranked number five out of 42.

Speaker, I'm so proud that Reader's Digest has recognized what I have known for a long time, and that is that Windsor is a great place to be and a great place for families. I'm so proud to see my hometown of Windsor receive this great recognition, which it truly deserves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements. The member for Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel!"—

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's not time for petitions.

Mr. Jonah Schein: I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock and reset. We'll move to statements. The member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

WELLESLEY FALL FAIR

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, tomorrow marks the 159th anniversary of the Wellesley fall fair in Kitchener—Conestoga. This community event brings together families and friends to celebrate our local farmers and learn about the history of agriculture in Ontario.

This year's theme is Sow, Grow, Raise and Show. The festivities will kick off with the fair ambassador competition, which has attracted dedicated contestants who have been involved in the fair for most of their lives. I'm proud to see how great the finalists are this year, in fact. All the competitors are active youth in the community, and all show a great passion for learning in order to serve people better.

The best of luck goes out to Hayden Lorentz, 19, of St. Clements; Katherine Baer, 20, from Wellesley; Lianna Charlene Barnard, 17, of Wellesley; and Lisa Guenther, 17, also from Wellesley. Some of Kitchener—Conestoga's rising local talent will take the stage at this year's Wellesley ABC Idol semifinals. Again, I wish all these competitors the very best and look forward to an amazing show.

If you're coming, be sure to stop by my favourite event, the annual chocolate cake and pie auction.

It wouldn't be fall without community fairs like these. In fact it takes over 125 volunteers to put on a fair like this. So I'd like to thank all those dedicated folks who take the time out of their busy schedules to keep this event running with great success over the past 159 years. I look forward to seeing you at the fair.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It was interesting: About a week ago, the government made this wonderful announcement, they thought, in northern Ontario about the Northern Policy Institute—not that anybody in northern Ontario is opposed to the idea of somebody talking about northern issues. God, you know that we are trying to do that at infinitum, all of us in northern Ontario with this government.

But it beckons a couple of questions. The government is going to take \$5 million from the northern heritage fund in order to fund the northern institute for the first year. So there's \$5 million that we don't have for economic development somewhere in northern Ontario. Number two, in the second year, they've got to find the money from the private sector. Well, I wish you well. I hope that they're successful in doing that, but it seems to me that it's going to be quite possibly difficult to achieve.

The other thing is that northerners know what they want. Minister, the northerners don't want to be consulted ad infinitum. We want you to stop privatizing the Ontario Northland. Keep the trains running. We want you to deal with electricity prices so people like Xstrata don't shut down the refinery and smelter and move off to Quebec. We need you to deal with the issues that face northern Ontario.

The ministers of the crown and the opposition have heard from the mayors. They've heard from the councillors. They've heard from the chambers of commerce. They're saying, "Stop the talk and do the walk and do the things that we've got to get done so northern Ontario can be respected when it comes to this particular government."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Oakville.

BRANTFORD RED SOX

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I think you will be interested in this one.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am, but: Order.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It was once said that trying to sneak a pitch past Hank Aaron was like trying to sneak the sunrise past a rooster. But then again, Hank Aaron never faced Brantford Red Sox pitcher Chris Chavez. Thanks to the pitching of Chavez and the swinging sensation of two-run bomb Tyler Burnell, the Brantford Red Sox swept the Barrie Baycats 4-0 to capture their fifth consecutive Intercounty Baseball League championship with an 8-0 win last Wednesday. It all came together for the Brantford Red Sox with a strong offence and a quick-witted defence that has Brant-area residents roaring with pride.

The Red Sox, who hail from the same hometown as our Speaker, the Honourable Dave Levac, has a very proud history. They were founded in 1911 when they joined the Canadian Baseball League. After that league folded, unfortunately, due to World War I, the team went on to play in the Michigan-Ontario League and then the Ontario League. They joined the Intercounty Baseball League in 1950. They've won nine consecutive championships, with the last five coming in a row, tying an intercounty league record. Their Drive for Five is now complete.

Congratulations go out to Paul Aucoin, owner of the Red Sox; the players; and the support staff. Perhaps a

ticker tape parade is in the works, Speaker. Congratulations to all.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That was a really good statement.

JACQUELINE RASENBERG

Mr. Rod Jackson: Today, I'd like to recognize an outstanding member of the Barrie community. Jacqueline Rasenberg is a firefighter who holds eight world titles in the World Firefighter Combat Challenge over the course of her 10 years' competing. She has competed as a team member, in tandem and as an individual, and plans to represent Canada this year with her teammate Amber. Jacque trains hard to ensure that the citizens in Barrie are protected and safe from fire emergencies.

The fire combat challenge annually attracts hundreds of US and Canadian municipal firefighters and fire departments from more than 25 locations and is now expanding to countries around the world, including New Zealand, Germany, Argentina, Chile and South Africa. The challenge seeks to encourage firefighter fitness and demonstrate the profession's rigours to the public. Competitors wear full gear and race head-to-head as they simulate the physical demands of real-life firefighting by performing a linked series of five tasks, including climbing a five-storey tower; hoisting; chopping; dragging hoses; and rescuing a life-sized 175-pound "victim" as they race against themselves, their opponent and the clock. It's no small feat to be one of the top firefighters in the world.

Firefighters make an exceptional contribution to our community in Barrie, risking their lives to protect all of us. I'm proud to say that we have such a world-class accomplished firefighter living in Barrie, right here at home. Congratulations to Jacque and good luck on her endeavours as she represents our country.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I stand to correct my record. I apologize to the House. The interns will not be here until Wednesday, I've been notified. I got my list a little too quickly and too early, and I was too enthusiastic.

Thank you for allowing that to stand down. It's no longer needed. We will do the introduction of the interns on Wednesday.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): An order of the House dated September 5, 2012, provides an allocation of time for proceedings of Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. The order

provides that the Standing Committee on Social Policy shall report Bill 115 to the House no later than Monday, September 10, 2012.

The House not having received this report during reports by committees today, the bill, as amended, is therefore deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Shall the report be adopted? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated September 5, the bill is ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from my constituents in the riding of Durham which reads as follows:

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. (Hydro One) is proposing construction of a new transformer station on a 100-acre site in Clarington, near the Oshawa-Clarington boundary;

"Whereas the site is on the Oak Ridges moraine/green-belt;

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"Whereas concerns have been raised by the residents about the environmental impacts of this development, including harm to wildlife as well as contamination of ponds, streams and the underground water supply;

"Whereas sites zoned for industrial and/or commercial use are the best locations for large electricity transformer stations;

"Whereas most, if not all, residents do not agree this project is needed and that, if proven to be necessary, it could be best accommodated at alternative locations such as Cherrywood or Wesleyville;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Ontario Legislature support the preservation of the Oak Ridges moraine, the greenbelt and the natural environment at this site. We also ask that the Ontario Legislature require the Clarington transformer station to be built at an alternative location zoned for industrial facilities and selected in accordance with the best planning principles."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Jacqueline, one of the pages.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I support this petition, I'll sign my name to it and give it to page Parnika.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiations in medical diagnostic and radiation therapy procedures; and

"Whereas the main piece of legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (HARPA), dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the act have kept pace with the explosion in imaging examinations, including image-guided procedures used in cardiology, radiation therapy, ultrasound, orthopaedics etc.;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with these petitions, sign them and pass them to page Sydney.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Liberal government has demonstrated that it simply does not understand the needs of rural Ontario and has unilaterally decided to prematurely cancel the extremely successful slots-at-racetracks program;

"Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates more revenue than all Ontario casinos combined and is the largest contributor to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.;

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry employs 60,000 Ontarians, including more than 31,000 full-time jobs, and is the second-largest employer within the agricultural sector of the Ontario economy;

"Whereas the horse racing and breeding industry contributes \$2 billion into Ontario's economy, with 80% of that spent in rural communities;

"Whereas the slots-at-racetracks program generates over \$1.1 billion in profits annually to the government of Ontario and another \$345 million that is shared between racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry;

"Whereas local racetracks spend a considerable portion of their revenue on charitable causes in their community;

"Whereas the loss of the slots-at-racetracks program revenue will force host communities to raise local property taxes by as much as 2% to offset the lost funds;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario must immediately recognize the damage that will be done to businesses, individuals and communities caused by its decision to end the slots and racetrack partnership. It must commit to reverse the decision immediately and commit to negotiating a fair, long-term income-sharing agreement between the OLG, racetracks, host communities and the horse racing industry, to take effect at the end of the current partnership agreement."

I agree with the petition and I'll affix my name to it.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt. It reads as follows:

"Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and successive governments in those two provinces have never repealed those laws; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

"Whereas the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and the long term as well as the well-being of its residents;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout."

I fully support this petition, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Maggie to bring it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of no accountability, complacency, waste, patient neglect and substandard care in our health care system;

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and oversight of most health care agencies is done by that agency or sometimes through the ministry;

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces in Canada where our Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of health care services;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include investigation of our health care services, including health units, hospitals, retirement homes, long-term-care facilities and ambulance services."

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it with page Zakhar.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to give it to Parnika and sign my name, to be delivered to the table.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas Street "at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

"Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

I will sign this petition and will send it up with Jasper.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's plan to cut more than \$1 billion in medical funding will impact my doctor's ability to provide" health "care for me and my family, and is a serious risk to health care in our community and across the province,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Reverse the recent unilateral cuts to medical funding, and negotiate in good faith with doctors for an agreement that will protect Ontario health care."

I agree with this, and I will be signing it.

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DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government" has made PET scanning "a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients under certain conditions...; and

"Whereas," since October 2009, "insured PET scans" are performed "in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with" Health

Sciences North, "its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly ... to make PET scans available through" Health Sciences North, "thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Leo to bring it to the Clerk.

ABATTOIRS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the number of locally inspected abattoirs is declining critically and the Harrietsville Women's Institute is writing to express our concern over the decline of small abattoirs affecting our local food system;

"Whereas government red tape is killing small food producers. Forcing small, local abattoirs to follow the same rules as large corporations is putting them out of business. Many the regulations do not improve quality, but result in more paperwork;

"Whereas our petition includes signatures from our community as well as Women's Institute members from five counties—this is not a local problem;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(a) To have the Ministry of Agriculture and Food assist small businesses in meat slaughter, processing and sale;

"(b) To have OMAFRA interpret and implement regulations, taking into account the differences between small abattoirs and large corporations;

"(c) To have OMAFRA remove regulatory clauses not necessary to food safety;

"(d) To have OMAFRA license abattoirs to deal with the slaughtering of horses."

We agree with this petition, and I affix my signature to this.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

On behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized because of the way they look, I'm going to sign this, give it to Sashin and have it delivered to the table.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme disease in Ontario and to have everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I'm very pleased to affix my signature to this petition and send it to the table.

TAXATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France G  linas: I have a very short petition, Mr. Speaker, so I'm happy you recognized me. It's one line.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario...."

To ask Premier McGuinty to "take the unfair HST off of hydro and home heating bills."

I support this petition, will affix my name and ask page Leo to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORIT   AUX   L  VES

Ms. Broten moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en

oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'  ducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Does the minister care to lead off the debate? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It is my pleasure to rise in the House again to speak in support of the Putting Students First Act. I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Mississauga-Streetsville, who has so ably worked on this important file.

Let me say from the outset that this proposed legislation was not our first option; dialogue, engagement and good-faith consultations were. Rather, this proposed legislation is what we need to do as a result of the circumstances we find our province in.

We have had six months of sincere discussions with our education partners, discussions that were tough but productive, challenging and constructive.

Sans nos efforts soutenus    la table de la n  gociation et sans les efforts d  ploy  s par certains de nos partenaires qui, par leur participation, ont fait montre d'un v  ritable leadership, nous n'aurions pas pu   tablir les bases   quitables et   quilibr  es du projet de loi devant nous aujourd'hui.

I am, of course, speaking about the memorandum of understanding between the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and our government. Had it not been for our hard work at the bargaining table and the hard work of some of our partners, who demonstrated true leadership by their participation, we would not have achieved the fair and balanced foundation for the bill before us today.

The memorandum of understanding between the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and our government has formed the basis for other memoranda signed by the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO; the Association of Professional Student Services Personnel, APSSP; and a collection of associations representing 3,000 educational assistants.

This is the foundation of the proposed Putting Students First Act. As a result, the proposed act was shaped as much by the voice of teachers through their bargaining agents as it was by our government's fiscal requirements and policy objectives. This fact should give us all confidence that the proposed legislation is fair, considered and designed to meet the interests of all parties involved, specifically teachers, education sector workers, students, and all Ontarians concerned about the province's fiscal situation and economy.

Moreover, before we introduced the proposed legislation, we listened to the members of this House after proactively seeking their input. Some members were silent. Others were more willing to live up to the expectation of Ontarians and chose to work with us to find solutions. As a result, the bill before us today is also a reflection of our commitment to making minority government work, and it must, because failure to get

results cannot be an option when the stakes are as high as they are.

We must pass the proposed legislation as a necessary measure to secure the financial sustainability of our publicly funded education system and to provide the needed tools for stability in our schools. By passing the proposed act, we can protect the gains we've made in education while continuing to roll up our sleeves and to roll out full-day kindergarten, maintaining small class sizes and preserving 20,000 teacher and support staff jobs. Working together to pass the proposed act, we can reduce the provincial deficit in a fair, balanced and responsible manner while protecting the core services Ontarians rely on, including our world-class, publicly funded education system.

We must pass it quickly because time has run out. Already, teacher and support staff contracts, which have significant financial consequences for the government's fiscal plan towards a balanced budget, have rolled over. This legislation, however, requires that boards roll back the additional pay and benefits that have rolled over. This is an important tool, one we would rather not have relied upon but on which we will rely, as, without the support of the third party, this legislation was not able to be put in place before September 1.

The long-term sustainability of our publicly funded education system relies on our ability to be sound managers of the province's finances and also to stand firm in our commitment to maintain the progress we've made in our schools. This piece of legislation helps us do exactly that.

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No responsible government would sit idly by when, after six months—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pardon me?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just a point of order: I think the member meant in her speech "the support of the Conservative Party," not the third party. If you would correct, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's not a point of order, and you can debate the bill later on.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But I got it in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize and return to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Thank you very much.

As I said, this is an important tool, and this piece of legislation does not have the support of the third party. As a result of not having the support of the third party, it was not able to be in place before September 1, Speaker.

No responsible government would sit idly by when, after six months of sincere attempts to reach agreements with all of our education partners, those who saw fit to walk away from discussions, never to return, are now threatening the labour peace and stability in our schools that we have carefully nurtured since taking office. Some of these parties only gave us one hour of their time before they abandoned discussions for six months.

We drafted this legislation. We based it on a fairly negotiated agreement with a union that demonstrated a clear commitment to its members as well as to taxpayers. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association should be commended for their hard work and their skill at the discussion table.

Through perseverance and problem-solving and our openness to their input and ideas, we reached a memorandum of understanding.

The OECTA memorandum, as those of AEFO, APSSP and others, are a win for families, teachers and all of us who depend on and benefit from our public services and the taxpayers who pay for them.

Frankly, Speaker, what we agreed to with OECTA is better than what we had first come to the table with, and that is because it is a fairly negotiated agreement with input from key education partners.

If passed, the Putting Students First Act would ensure that school labour and employment contracts fit the government's fiscal and policy priorities and contain measures to secure two years free from labour disruptions.

Meeting our fiscal and policy priorities means staying on track towards budgetary balance without compromising the gains and quality improvements we have made in the last nine years and without sacrificing 20,000 teaching and support staff positions.

We need to achieve the right balance between our important fiscal goals and the preservation of the classroom experience for children from junior kindergarten to grade 12 and to avoid significant job losses. This proposed bill achieves that balance by incorporating the parameters of the memorandum negotiated by the government and OECTA.

These parameters achieve our policy and fiscal goals, are fair and were subject to the give and take of good-faith consultations and discussions in our provincial discussion table process.

We went into the PDT process with a firm but fair position that would allow us to meet our fiscal and policy goals. Some parties, regrettably, decided not to engage with us and walked away from the table. Others stayed and did the heavy lifting with us. They brought good ideas to the table and, in early July, we reached a compromise which is reflected in the memorandum and which has been signed with OECTA. We had a road map for others to follow. From early July onward, we encouraged all of our remaining partners to follow the road map and use the summer months to continue the hard work of reaching fair agreements that serve the public interest.

Now we need our Legislature to step in and provide the legal mechanism that is needed to help the remaining parties finish what they are either unable or unwilling to do.

If passed, the act would require that school boards and local bargaining units of teachers and support staff accept local agreements consistent with the priorities reflected in the memorandum between the government and OECTA. If passed, the act would require that local agreements

include provisions and parameters consistent with those in the OECTA MOU, including a 0% salary increase in 2012-13 and 2013-14 and the freezing of retirement gratuity entitlements for the payment of unused sick days at the August 31, 2012, entitlement.

We took this approach because, in these challenging fiscal times, we had a choice: a choice to spend more on teacher and staff pay and benefits or to protect our investments in full-day kindergarten, small class sizes and teacher and support staff jobs. As stewards of our education system, we have the privilege and responsibility to ensure the long-term sustainability of the system we cherish.

"Sustainability" means we needed to address the rate of growth in education. We could have taken the advice of Don Drummond and others, who suggested we increase class sizes and halt the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Doing that would not have put students and parents first, and taking that approach wouldn't have been putting teachers first either, because we would have seen the loss of 10,000 teaching positions as a result.

We've been fair, balanced and responsible in our discussions with our partners. We have fully engaged in the process of good-faith consultation and consideration, and the proposed act reflects the culmination of that process.

We respect the collective bargaining process between school employers and bargaining agents. That's why the Putting Students First Act leaves the bargaining parties with ownership of that process and the flexibility to craft local solutions to local issues. Under the proposed bill, they still have time to reach agreements that are flexible to meet their needs. Such agreements will need to be substantively identical to the OECTA memorandum.

We've been fair, reasonable, responsible and flexible. We've given the parties plenty of time and encouragement to get the job done. When we were left with no other pathway forward, we did what we needed to do, and we drafted legislation.

The bill before us today includes revision, as I have said, that reflected the priorities of some members of this House, and we are grateful for their input and also for their anticipated support. Specifically I am speaking to language around fair hiring and diagnostic assessment. We changed the original draft of the act to reflect that balanced diagnostic assessment and fair and transparent hiring practices will not be a required element in a collective agreement for any other union or board that has not already signed an agreement by August 31. That means that our partners, OECTA and AEFO, who have signed memorandums, would have those specific terms included in their local collective agreements. But other parties would not, unless they signed a memorandum on or before August 31.

To be clear, this would not affect the ability to make a regulation under the Education Act with respect to hiring practices, nor would it affect the Ministry of Education's ability to issue a policy and program memorandum with respect to the use of diagnostic assessments of students

under that act. In fact, we still intend to do just that: to introduce a fair hiring regulation under the Education Act that will cover all school boards in Ontario, and to issue a policy directive regarding the use of diagnostic assessments.

Some have asked why we are pursuing these issues. The answer to that question is because, for years, teachers have spoken to our government about these very items, and during the 300 hours-plus of discussion with OECTA, fair hiring and diagnostic assessments came up again and again.

What we heard is that hiring practices, especially for young teachers seeking long-term or permanent positions, need to be more transparent, and they would benefit from having a uniform practice across all school boards.

Secondly, we heard that teachers, people who are highly trained in assessing students' needs, should be given a greater role in determining the selection and use of diagnostic assessment tools for their students, based on informed professional judgment. To do so, teachers tell us, is not to diminish the necessary oversight and expertise of principals and school boards but rather to recognize that teachers dealing with students on a daily basis are well positioned and well trained to determine how best to assess student learning.

Ultimately, these issues will be pursued outside of the proposed act, and that is because we respected the position of our colleagues in the House. Their support is necessary to pass this bill expeditiously so that we can respond quickly to the automatic rollover of salary grid increases and bankable sick-day accumulation.

To ensure that our students enter their second week of a new school year, we have the legislative tools to achieve stability in our schools. This means that students will continue to have access to the world-class education system they deserve.

Soyez assurés : le système d'éducation de l'Ontario est l'un des meilleurs au monde, et c'est grâce à notre partenariat avec le secteur de l'éducation et aux objectifs communs que nous avons depuis que nous sommes venus au pouvoir.

Ces objectifs consistent à améliorer le rendement des élèves, à réduire les écarts de rendement pour les élèves en difficulté, et à renforcer la confiance en notre système d'éducation, financé par les fonds publics.

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En travaillant avec nos partenaires, nous avons réalisé ces trois objectifs. Les résultats aux tests sont meilleurs et les taux d'obtention de diplômes sont en hausse. Les élèves de l'Ontario se placent maintenant parmi les plus performants du pays et du monde.

Make no mistake: Ontario's education system is one of the best in the world. That is the result of our partnership with the education sector and common goals since we first came to office. These goals are: increasing student achievement, reducing gaps in achievement for struggling students, and building confidence in our publicly funded education system.

Working with our partners, we have delivered on all three goals. Test scores are up. Graduation rates continue to rise. Ontario students are now ranked among the highest achievers in the country and the world. The Organisation for Economic Development Program for International Student Assessment in 2009 ranked Ontario students among the top 10 readers in the world.

According to the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program's 2010 report, Ontario students were the only group to perform above the Canadian average in all three areas of math, reading and science. In fact, Ontario students scored significantly higher than the Canadian average in all three subjects and were first when it came to reading, the only students to perform above the national average in that area.

Our efforts to close the gap—the student achievement gap and the socio-economic gap—are working. Ontario is now recognized as one of the few jurisdictions in the world where 92% of students are meeting or exceeding international standards, regardless of socio-economic background or first language, and that is astounding progress.

Perhaps our greatest achievement with our partners has been full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a decade—in a generation. As of this September, about 120,000 students and their families will be benefiting from FDK. That is up from 50,000 in 2011 and 35,000 in 2010.

The achievements of our students, teachers, educators and administrators working together have contributed to our final and important goal: restoring public confidence in Ontario's publicly funded education system. We've come such a long way in less than a decade. In 2003-4, the graduation rate in Ontario was 68%; now it is 82%. That's 93,000 more students with a high school diploma than would have, had the rate remained at the 2003-4 level. But our work is not done. We are committed to driving the grad rate up to 85%.

When it comes to how our students are doing, we just released yet another increase in test scores: 70% of our students are now meeting the provincial standard. That's an increase of 16 percentage points, but our goal is to get that number up to 75%. As a result of our hard work together, we've been able to energize our system and our students to achieve strong and equitable learning outcomes. Today's learning outcomes will help our students compete in tomorrow's knowledge economy, and that's why our commitment to Ontario's student achievement agenda is steady and unwavering and has been reflected every step of the way in our ongoing dialogue with our education partners.

These and other results are a true Ontario success story. They have put our education system on the map, our kids on track to a brighter future and our economy on a pathway to future prosperity, and we cannot risk these gains now. They must be protected. We cannot sacrifice the classroom experience for additional compensation and unaffordable benefits, and we cannot risk our fiscal sustainability, be it the sustainability of our publicly

funded education system or our province, in order to give more to those who have already received so much.

The proposed Putting Students First Act is a reflection of our government's commitment to protecting the gains we've made in education and to preserve the classroom experience by continuing to roll out full-day kindergarten, keeping class sizes small and protecting 20,000 teaching and support staff jobs.

I strongly encourage all of my colleagues and all Ontarians to move this proposed legislation forward. Doing so will be fiscally responsible and will provide Ontario families with the certainty they deserve.

But also, by passing the law quickly, we will help facilitate more effective local bargaining, a process this proposed legislation respects and provides room for while ensuring that many of the significant issues, such as compensation, are already taken care of. The best pathway forward exists in the fair, balanced and responsible proposed legislation at hand.

As I said from the beginning, the proposed legislation comes after six months of sincere outreach to our education partners. It is a crucial opportunity for us all to show Ontarians we are serious about the success of our students and the province. I look forward to your support for the Putting Students First Act and the certainty all of the colleagues in this House will help bring to the new school year.

I certainly look forward to the support of this legislation, and together, in this House, we can certainly put Ontario students first. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnett): Did you not say you were going to share your time with the member for Mississauga?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnett): Oh, in rotation. Okay.

The member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 115. Before I start, obviously I would like to thank a few members who have been working throughout this process, as I often like to do once we've been through committee.

This is the second big bill that this minister has brought forward. She's got our support on this one, and I'll outline why. Although we do not view this bill as perfect, it does address some of the measures that we have been concerned about for some time. But nevertheless, I do want to acknowledge the hard work of our Chair at social policy committee, MPP Ernie Hardeman, who was able to get through clause-by-clause, as well as deputations; my colleague Jane McKenna from the Ontario PC side—she worked very hard; I want to say thank you to her. I'll go towards my left: MPPs Cheri DiNovo and Peter Tabuns. Mr. Tabuns is, of course, the education critic for the New Democrats. I always find, regardless of our positions—and rarely do we agree on policy—that he's quite a gentleman to work with. I'd like to say thanks to MPP Bob Delaney, who was the Liberal

lead on the committee, as well as MPPs Tracy MacCharles, Dipika Damerla and Amrit Mangat.

You really get to know people in this assembly when you get down to brass tacks at committee. We had that opportunity, albeit it was, I think, fairly short. I will outline some of my frustration with the committee process at this particular point in time because there were a couple of votes where the Chair actually did have to make the deciding vote, and it didn't quite go our way. But Speaker, it brings me to why we're here today, and it should be no surprise to you or anyone in this chamber what the motivation is on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak.

For quite some time, we have been very concerned with the economy and how that has been managed by this current Liberal government. In fact, the financial state that we find ourselves in here in Ontario isn't a desirable one. It's one that actually does threaten our public services, particularly those core public services that we value.

Let me go into that a little bit, Speaker. This is a government that is facing a \$30-billion deficit. As I've stated time and time again in this chamber, don't take my word for it; take Don Drummond's, their hand-picked economic adviser, who said that we are facing a \$30-billion deficit and we must take steps to address that. As a result, on our side, we have consistently spoken about the need for a broader public sector wage freeze so that we can address the skyrocketing cost of government and save about \$2 billion annually across government so that we can put that toward the debt and the deficit, to get us out of that.

I also have a stat—I guess it's a stat—that is used by the Minister of Finance himself that says that the third-largest spending priority of this government—outside of health care and education, the big one and two—is servicing the debt and the deficit.

1400

What does that mean, Speaker? It means that every single dollar being spent to service the debt and the deficit, particularly when interest rates are low—they'll go up soon, and when they do, it's going to be even higher—is a dollar less for kids in our classrooms. It's a dollar less for patients in health care, and I must say that it is larger, that servicing the debt and deficit—we spend more money on that than almost every other single government department combined, outside of health care and education. So it is time that we get our costs in Ontario under control. You cannot continue to sign contracts you can't afford to keep. It's time for restraint, and that is where we're at.

Since the last election, our leader, Tim Hudak, has been calling for a broader public sector wage freeze, as I had mentioned. In fact, he went so far as to meet privately with Premier McGuinty to talk about the need for a broader public sector wage freeze. I don't mean a broader public sector wage freeze just attacking teachers, and I don't mean a broader public sector wage freeze just attacking doctors. I'm suggesting, as was Tim Hudak,

that we're all in this together, and the best way to get out of this, if that JFK moment is true for Ontario—it's not what your province can do for you but what you can do for your province—together we had to work toward reducing the size and cost of government.

Mr. McGuinty rejected that advice and, as you know, he went forward with a budget that he negotiated with the NDP on, and we actually saw there were higher taxes for a certain bracket of individuals in Ontario and there was an increase in spending. That said, we continued on our course for a broader public sector wage freeze, and my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Jeff Yurek, put forward a piece of legislation that anyone in this assembly who was concerned about the debt and deficit could have supported. He had called for a broader public sector wage freeze then, back in May. At the time, the government was still rejecting this notion that we had to get our fiscal house in order, and they defeated that.

What happened over the summer, Speaker, was that I think they understood that there was a requirement to get their spending under control; otherwise it was going to compromise public education and kids in the classroom. That's when they came forward with a memorandum of understanding with OECTA.

Now, I'm going to be very blunt with you, Speaker. At the time—and we still do have reservations. We are concerned about the numbers in the OECTA deal. As you'll recall, whether it was in the press or throughout this period of time where we've had debate in the chamber about Bill 115, I've had serious reservations about the numbers in the OECTA road map, and here is why: We don't believe that this is a full wage freeze. A full, true broader public sector wage freeze means you freeze wages. You don't allow for grid movement. This is what this does. As a result, there will be \$450 million tacked on to the province as a result of that grid movement. Now, there are some offsets, and I will give credit where it is due. There are offsets were agreed to by OECTA that come to about \$150 million. The problem, Speaker, is there is still a \$300-million gap in the fiscal plan. When you're talking about a \$30-billion deficit, \$300 million is very significant in trying to address that, so there is a gap, and there is a gap that we are concerned about. It is a gap that we have continued to press the government on, and indeed, we are now concerned with that, but we're going to move forward.

We also know, for example, that the government, throughout this negotiation, changed its financial parameters. I'll give you an example. In the Ontario budget of last year, as well as on the Ministry of Education's own website, there was discussion that they would eliminate that grid freeze. They chose not to do that. In fact, a few weeks ago the minister did put out a memorandum or communiqué to the public that said that they actually changed their fiscal parameters. That is very problematic when we're dealing with a very serious issue.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It was negotiated.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I hear some concern here from the Minister of Health, and I may ask her just to sort of

read up on what's been happening, because I'm not sure she's got the memo that we actually said we'd support this. But we are allowed to voice our concerns here in the official opposition. That's why we were sent here: to remind them and to keep them honest.

Speaker, the other issue that we have very serious concerns about and reservations, and we've put forward amendments at committee, was stripping managerial rights from school boards and principals who weren't at the table with the government. That's a significant problem when you are talking to duly elected school boards and telling them that you're going to usurp their responsibility. That's why we put forward several amendments last week. Unfortunately, they were defeated.

The two areas of concern, of course, are diagnostics; that is, assessments of children in the classroom. We believe that school boards and principals still have a role in that. The other is hiring and making sure that the best people for the job are there. The government would be content in saying that it's the union's job to make sure those folks are hired. We're content in saying that it's the administrator's and the school board's job, as well as the principal's, to be doing that.

Nevertheless, while we are still concerned about the fiscal parameters and how school boards had to be treated, the official opposition had to make a very serious choice. It was one we had many discussions about together, and one we're very comfortable with.

As you are well aware, our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, has spoken at length about the constitutionality of a broader public sector wage freeze; our leader has spoken about the need for a broader public sector wage freeze; Jeff Yurek, our MPP from Elgin-Middlesex-London, has tabled legislation talking about a broader public sector wage freeze; and our finance critic, Peter Shurman, has been up, day in and day out, calling for a broader public sector wage freeze. So we had two choices: allow a 5.5% increase in wages come September 1, after calling for a province-wide wage freeze, or accept the fact that finally this government has started to listen to Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus and all those critics I just mentioned and partially adopted our plan for a legislated wage freeze.

It became very clear which approach we needed to take. It was the one that was going to cut the size and scope and cost of government. It was the one that was going to bring our fiscal house back in order, albeit not the perfect way to do it but close enough to the way we had put forward that we could support this piece of legislation.

I'm sure there will be much said in this assembly in the days ahead on this legislation, as well as in the public and in classrooms across Ontario. I do know, for example, that there will be anger at the government, and perhaps even at myself for supporting this legislation, by many of the teachers' unions.

I guess I would have this to say: We respect the work you do. Teachers do great work. I have a daughter in school, and I'm very proud every day that she comes

home from school and says she's had a great day. I know the Speaker's wife is a teacher, and I know that our Speaker, Mr. Levac, was a principal. Everyone in this chamber has the greatest respect for Ontario's teachers, and we know they do great work. But the problem we are faced with is that we cannot continue to afford wage increases. In fact, one of the problems we do have is that we have 3,999 more collective bargaining agreements to be negotiated.

This brings me back to why we in the opposition said that the best way to approach this would have been one piece of legislation treating every single worker in the broader public sector equally. It would have been fairer, it would have been more comprehensive and it would have saved \$2 billion a year to help us get our fiscal house in order.

They chose not to do that. Now, our concern in the official opposition is that this is going to be piecemeal, and every time they make an agreement with a union or decide they're going to move forward on a piece of legislated wage freeze for one other sector, we're going to have more legislation in this House and more division in Ontario, and we're going to be having duelling press conferences each and every single time. We don't think that's the right way to go. In fact, our biggest criticism to date has been how this has been handled. We think that Ontario can do better than this.

However, we are at this point, and as I've stated several times, we have a choice before us. We have a very important choice before us as we face a \$30-billion deficit in this province. It is to get our costs under control so we have long-term sustainability of our public education system, so that there is public education not just for my daughter but for my granddaughter. That is why we are here today. We have a choice. It is a very clear one: Support a 5.5% wage increase that this province cannot afford, or adopt a partial wage freeze that will ensure the sustainability and the longevity of our public education system.

1410

It is never an easy choice, Speaker, but it is a choice that must be made. We must make tough choices in this assembly. It sure as heck is easy to say anything you want to because you're not in charge of the fiscal problems of the Ontario government, it sure as heck is easy to say anything when you are beholden to special interests, and it sure as heck is really simple to say anything when you do not—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Name names. Come on, Lisa. You can do it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod:—have any concern whatsoever for the amount of taxes people pay. Speaker, it is never easy to do what needs to be done in this House all the time. Today, we are here and we are going to support Bill 115 because it is the right thing to do. It is the tough thing, but it is the right thing to do.

Now, to my hecklers from behind me in the third party, the rhetoric can be trumped up, and they can enjoy their time trying to malign us and the government.

They're trying to suggest that we hate a certain group of public sector employees or that we don't care about institutions; we'll just blow them up. I could say some equally rhetorical things; however, I won't, because it is beneath this House when they decide to go where they would like to go with people's lives and particularly with schoolchildren.

Did I get everything in this bill that I would have liked? No. Did we ask a number of questions of the government that we didn't get satisfactory answers to? We certainly did. We asked a number of them. However, when confronted with the very real choice of a 5.5% wage increase the province couldn't afford and a partial wage freeze, which is what we've been asking for—and which our leader says is half a loaf and to keep pressing—we chose the responsible thing to do for the longevity of the public education system. I'm proud that we're making the tough decision and the right decision and the one that's going to pave the way forward for the sustainability of public education.

As I said, it's never an easy decision. It's never an easy decision. But when you take into consideration all the facts—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's never easy being a bully.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —it's important to do the right thing.

I understand that our colleagues in the third party are very upset at this point in time. I think they'll use this to their advantage the way only they could do. But I remind people, particularly those at home who are watching, that decisions like this need to be made. They're never easy. You never want to make them. You never want to look at somebody and say, "We can't give you a wage increase. We know you've worked hard all year." But simply, if you're in a small community and your local business is the biggest employer in town and is not making a lot of money, they're not going to be able to give wage increases. That's where we're at here in Ontario today. If that's the case in our small businesses, we've got to really start to respect the private sector's ability to pay when we're dealing with the public sector.

Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to debate here. We will, as I said, be supporting this legislation. It isn't everything we would have desired, but it is a start, and we will continue to press the government for a broader public sector wage freeze—one we think can be done the right way, one we believe is constitutional and one that we believe will help us get out of the fiscal mess we are in.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity today, and I particularly want to say thank you to my Progressive Conservative colleagues, who have been so understanding with this whole issue and who have worked very hard, as I have, to bring this issue to the floor and to bring our concerns to the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: After that speech, I feel like that kid at the baseball game who says, "Let me in, Coach. Let me in."

A couple of things: I'm going to digress for one minute. I listened to the intent, and I respect the member from Nepean—Carleton—have I got the riding right? She's here because she believes in what she does, and she believes it fervently. I'm not going to fault her for that, but listen, trying to portray this as it's not an easy decision—it was a pretty easy decision for Tim Hudak and Dalton McGuinty to decide to do what it is that they did, and to try to characterize it as anything other than that, I think is a bit beyond the pale.

Let me make a couple of points. We know what this thing was all about. The government, right from the beginning, decided that, rather than listen to what had been offered by teachers, which was a wage freeze, at the beginning of negotiations, they wanted to create a crisis. This government needed to have a crisis in education à la Mr. Snobelen—remember the old former Minister of Education, the Conservative that was elected under Mike Harris, who said, "I will create a crisis in education as a means to achieve what it is that I want as change in the education system"? The Minister of Education followed the same thing that Mr. Snobelen had put forward.

It was not good enough that the people who arrived at the bargaining table, the teachers' federations and unions, who said, "We're prepared on the two-year wage freeze"; they had to be able to create a crisis. Why? Because the government was in the midst of trying to pull off an upset and to be able to win some ridings in by-elections to be able to change the tables in this Legislature so that they can have themselves a majority government. They certainly didn't want the people talking about the issues of the day. Did the government want people at the ballot box to be thinking about the Ornge scandal? Did they want the people at the ballot box to be thinking about having to essentially pay off companies for cancelling contracts in Mississauga and Oakville? Did they want the people at the ballot box to think of the killing of the horse racing industry that this government is perpetrating as a result of some decisions that they made recently? They didn't want people thinking about those things as they went into the ballot box. They had to change the channel. They had to say, "Don't look over here, where the Liberals are really kind of weak; look over here. We have something else for you." And that something else was essentially trying to bash public sector workers and teachers. That's what it was all about.

They looked at the polling numbers—and I'm sure the Conservatives have looked at it, and we've looked at it and others. Unfortunately in our society, there are people out there that like it when you bash unions and you bash teachers. So the government, in my view, of Dalton McGuinty decided to do this as a way to be able to garner votes. He figured, "If I can get people looking over here in this manufactured crisis of negotiations and I can get people to believe that the teachers really didn't offer a two-year wage freeze, that teachers really didn't say they didn't want to go on strike and that teachers really said they wanted to negotiate at the bargaining table, we're going to get this crisis so that people can look over here

and forget all about these things that are happening in the background that makes it very difficult for the government to be able to win that by-election." That's what this was all about.

The unfortunate reality is that we've squandered probably the best opportunity we've had in a long time to negotiate a fair agreement with teachers. When was the last time that you saw a bargaining committee come to the table and say, "Listen, we're prepared to have a two-year wage freeze," as the opening position? I've negotiated private sector and I've negotiated public sector; I've been on both sides of the table. I can tell you, if I had my bargaining agents coming to me as the employer saying, "I'm prepared to take a two-year wage freeze," that would be the beginning towards an agreement. And yes, were there some issues that were outstanding? Were there some things that maybe the government needed in order to further meet its fiscal targets? Quite possibly. But a large part of it had been put to bed when the teachers offered up a two-year wage freeze. So this government decided to create this crisis as a way to be able to deal with by-elections.

I was told something a long time ago by a good friend of mine, Moses Sheppard, when I was in the union movement back then with the United Steelworkers. Moe was my staff rep, and I remember one time losing a vote at a membership meeting on something that I really felt passionately about. He said to me, "Gilles, never worry. The members are infinitely more wise than you give them credit for. If they didn't vote for that particular motion you wanted, maybe there was good reason." As I looked at it after, that was exactly the case, and that's what happened in Kitchener-Waterloo. I think voters understood that what the government was trying to do was, quite frankly, unfair, it was unwarranted, and they weren't about to reward a government for playing that card.

So I just say to my friends across the way and the Conservatives on this side of the table: You're saying that this was not an easy decision. Of course it's an easy decision. This government and the Tories don't want to do the hard work that has to be done, which is to roll up your sleeves and sit down with workers and managers to work out a fair compromise when it comes to a constraint-type budget.

Do you think that unions across this country and across this province have never had to face negotiations behind the eight ball? I came out of the mining sector in the 1970s and 1980s. There wasn't a collective agreement until after 1983—that was a collective agreement that we moved forward on. As steelworkers, we had to negotiate concessions with our employers. Why? Because we understood that the employer was having a tough time. The price of gold was \$270 an ounce. You couldn't make a profit at that number, and everybody knew it. So the workers sent the union in—I was on that negotiating committee—to negotiate a very difficult contract for us, and it was essentially trying not to lose too much, doing some temporary concessions to help the

employer out, so that in good times we'd be able to get that money back.

1420

That's what workers have been doing in this province for years, and the government just kind of forgot all about that. They forgot that at the beginning of bargaining the teachers said, "We're going to give you a two-year wage freeze." That's regrettable because I think there was a willingness—and there still is a willingness, talking to the people I've talked to who are on the bargaining committee for the various teachers' federations. I believe it's still there. There was a willingness at the beginning of all of this to do what's right for everybody, to protect those teachers, especially junior teachers who have just started in the system, who are making \$45,000 a year if they're lucky, and look at ways of being able to allow those teachers to progress in some way—but that overall there would be a wage freeze. The unions were prepared to talk about, "Can we look at benefits in a different way? Are there different ways of delivering benefits that are able to deliver good benefits to our members for cheaper?" Those conversations were readily available to be had with the bargaining agent. Instead, what did the government do? It played this crisis, and I think that's rather regrettable. As a result of that, the government has polarized this whole situation. I don't know how it's going to go from here. I'm not clairvoyant.

One thing I do know: If people work hard, there's an agreement to be had. But trying to force these types of settlements on to people by way of fiat, essentially by way of this Legislature, I think, is wrong-headed. I'll just speak to this for a little bit because I know our critic Mr. Tabuns is going to take up the rest of the time on this debate.

Democracy is a wonderful thing. We turn on the TV and see what's going on in Syria. We saw what happened in Libya, what happened in Egypt and other parts of the world. We all see it and we feel it. Nobody in this House has a monopoly on this issue. In those countries, people are literally picking up guns, they're strapping on bombs to put themselves and others in harm's way, to get a democracy, a place where people are able to settle their differences by way of the ballot box in the institutions of democracy, and it's quite something to behold.

Here we are in Canada, so fortunate, so lucky that we live in a democratic society. Not only do we get a chance to decide who's going to be our government for the next four years and who will be our local representative, but we have institutions of democracy that allow a democracy to live and breathe. One of those things is the right for workers to join a union. It is a democratic right. Imagine a society where we decide, as legislators, or the House of Commons decides that you're no longer going to have that. That you don't like unions or hate unions is not the point. The point is, they're part of our democratic institution that allows workers to negotiate with their employers for fair wages and a fair crack about how you do things within the workplace.

Once we start doing things like we're doing in Bill 115 that say, "We're going to take away the democratic right of citizens of this province, in this case teachers and educational workers, to be able to freely bargain," I think that's a real problem. I think it's an affront to our democracy. Democracy is not something that you all of a sudden wake up to every four years and go to the ballot box with. Democracy is something that lives and breathes every day between campaigns.

There are institutions such as the Human Rights Code that I believe this legislation violates. It's about having the ability to go to the courts to have your say if you think there's something that is not in keeping with the Constitution of Canada or the laws of this land, something that this legislation is taking away. When a government puts in legislation that you're not only going to trample over the rights of people to collectively bargain, but you're not going to give them a chance to get to the courts, you're not going to give them the chance to go to the Human Rights Tribunal—God, we're not even going to give the Labour Relations Board the ability to decide on this. You're trampling on people's democratic rights, and that's something that I think this Legislature should take seriously.

I don't care if you like unions or not. I don't care if you're Tim Hudak and you think everybody in Kitchener–Waterloo was a union boss—what a stupid comment that was. I wish there were 16,000 union bosses in KW. But I would just say, God—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Jeez. But my point is, to trample over the democratic rights of citizens, I think, is wrong. It's patently wrong.

Is negotiation hard? Damn right it is. It's tough. It's not easy from both sides of the table.

So what's going to happen in the end? Andrea Horwath has said it, and I think she will be proven right. As in British Columbia, this law will more than likely be struck down, because in fact, this law not only takes away the rights of people to freely collective-bargain, it tries to also limit their rights to the courts and to the Human Rights Tribunal and to the Ontario Labour Relations Act. So what happens a year or two down the road when this is possibly struck down? It means to say it's going to cost this province a whole bunch of money, probably more money than is being saved with this particular bill.

And then, here's the really ironic part of it—and this is what I think is so cynical on the part of the Liberals, because the Liberals are always about doing what's politically expedient for the Liberal Party and not necessarily doing what's right for the people of Ontario or Canada. You saw that federally, and you're seeing that now. It's probably not going to be a Liberal administration that will have to deal with this mess. It's a minority Parliament, and I've got to figure that within the next couple of years, there's a pretty strong possibility there will be an election before then. I would also think there's a pretty strong possibility that it's going to be

another government having to deal with it, either Conservative or NDP, and I would hope it's NDP. So they're pushing it off—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, God, we don't need four more years of Mike Harris-style government in this province. My lord. Whoa. So I just say—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We woke them up. That's so good. The sad part is that it's going to be—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Hey, don't you guys have bells to ring or something? Anyway.

So I just say it's a sad thing, because at the end of the day, this is going to cost us money. It will be to a future administration to deal with it, and I think that's really the cynical part of this whole thing.

So here we are. We're now into time-allocated third reading on this particular bill. We have about an hour and a bit left, and I want to leave most of our time to the critic for the NDP, Mr. Tabuns. But I just want to say that it's a sad, sad, sad day on a whole bunch of fronts: one, it's going to cost the province a lot more money if this thing is struck down; two, this is trampling over people's democratic rights. And there is an agreement to be had, if only the government would allow negotiations to happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Norm Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, it is a privilege to follow my colleague from Timmins–James Bay, who spoke very eloquently and very passionately about an issue that I'm sure, as legislators, we all feel very passionate about. There are many things that he said with which I, frankly, agree.

Speaker, he said one thing that I thought encapsulated pretty much the entire conundrum that has us sitting here on what should have been the first day that we had returned. Let's use his exact words: "If people work hard, there's an agreement to be had." There should have been an agreement to be had.

So let's just put another perspective on this. Why are we here? It wasn't the fault of the teachers or the NDP or the Conservatives or the government or the people of Ontario that the bottom fell out of the financial markets four years ago. Nonetheless, we're all here with that problem and its ramifications to deal with.

One of the nations that's had the hardest problem getting itself out of the mire of the most recent recession has been our neighbour with whom we are joined at the waist, the United States of America. Even today, although the proportion of our total exports has been declining for years, some 78% of everything that Ontario sells to anyone other than ourselves is sold to the United States of America. What that means, Speaker, is that if our biggest customer isn't buying, we're just going to have to adjust what we do. We've got to get through that, and that puts us where we are here.

So it was important for everyone involved to work hard, because as some of the other unions discovered,

there was indeed an agreement to be had. It wasn't the agreement that the bargaining units had in mind when they went in, or even the government had in mind when they went in, but it turned out to be a good, solid, sustainable and affordable agreement. We just wish that we had had a chance to complete it, with people whom we know by face, whom we respect and whom, as individuals, we like, and like a great deal.

1430

Teachers across the province are busy in their classrooms during this second week of the school year. As the minister has mentioned, the proposed Putting Students First Act will allow us all to move forward and let us focus on what's the most important thing, which is supporting the achievement and the well-being of our students.

While the proposed legislation puts students first, Ontario is also taking important steps to help teachers. To help qualified teachers get into the classroom, the government will be filing a regulation to help ensure fair hiring practices for occasional teachers. This new regulation is aimed at promoting consistent, fair and transparent hiring practices across all school boards in Ontario, and this will better position our occasional teachers for long-term contracts or permanent jobs in schools. Our government will help Ontario's students succeed by ensuring the most qualified teachers get into the classroom.

There's been some confusion surrounding fair hiring practices, so I'm pleased to have this opportunity to address the topic of fair hiring practices. Currently there is neither consistency nor transparency in how occasional teachers, many of whom have provided services to their boards for several years, can access opportunities for more extended contracts and permanent jobs.

In fact, there's some wrong information that we've heard out there. We've heard claims that the new regulation will take away a board's right as an employer to hire the best candidate for a job. This is simply not true. Some have claimed that boards will be required to hire based on seniority, rather than getting the best teacher for the role. Again, this is simply not true. Some people think that retired teachers will get most of the jobs, because they often have 25 or more years of seniority with the board. No. This is not correct either. Others allege that teacher quality will be compromised by the fact that the board will lose control over teacher hiring. This is also incorrect.

Given that there seems to be a lot of misinformation out there, please allow me to clarify how the hiring process will really work. School boards will organize their occasional teacher rosters by seniority, meaning the length of time each teacher has been on the school board's roster. When a teacher has been on the roster for a minimum of 10 months and has worked at least 20 days in that year, the teacher may apply to be included on the school board's long-term occasional, or LTO, list. LTO contracts are important because, rather than day-to-day work, these are contracts that are for continuous work,

for two weeks or more. The board will interview the teachers, and the successful applicants will be placed on the LTO list. Once on this list, teachers can apply for long-term contracts. When an LTO contract becomes available, the board will interview appropriate applicants and select the teacher who best meets the job requirements.

The regulation is very clear that the government expects boards to continue selecting and assigning teachers based on the provisions of the best possible program, the safety and well-being of the students, and the teachers' qualifications.

If a teacher has not received an unsatisfactory evaluation from the school board following a minimum four-month long-term occasional contract, the teacher is eligible to apply for permanent jobs, as they become available, if they meet the requirements of the position. Boards must give first consideration to these qualified teachers to fill a permanent position. A board may fill a permanent position with a teacher not on the long-term occasional teachers' list if there are no LTO applicants interviewed who are able to meet the requirements of that job.

Boards must post and regularly update a long-term occasional teacher list on their website. A notice of upcoming long-term or permanent teaching positions must be posted on a board's website at least five weekdays before conducting an interview or making an offer. The applicants who are interviewed but are unsuccessful may request a debriefing to learn how they can better prepare for the next opportunity.

School boards will continue to apply their hiring practices so that they meet the requirements of this regulation and also respect their collective agreements. I should point out that this new regulation will not affect the denominational rights of separate schools nor the linguistic rights of French-language schools. I want to be clear, though: Management will still make the ultimate decision about whom to hire.

The real difference here is recognizing that that role comes with a responsibility to create a process that can be equally accessed and understood by all. Plus, the process should recognize the experience and contributions of the teachers whom boards have selected for occasional teacher roles. The result here will be that our government will make the boards provide a hiring process that is fairer and more transparent. Confusion will be replaced with clarity. Uncertainty will be replaced with the confidence of knowing that occasional teachers have been given a fair opportunity to secure an open position. We will create consistency across the province by creating a regulation on fair hiring.

Working together, we can protect our gains in education. Class sizes are smaller. Full-day kindergarten is available in about 1,700 schools this September. Student achievement is up. More students are graduating now than ever before. Ontario is preserving these gains while protecting some 20,000 teaching and support staff positions.

Speaker, I've been to visit my colleagues in the United States. I've listened to some of them, from both sides of their aisle, talk about some of the compromises they've been forced to make, and about how they've been forced to lay off teachers and close schools. We are not proposing to do that. We don't need to do that. But what we do need to have is an agreement that's right for these times and sustainable and affordable for these times.

Our government is taking strong action to eliminate Ontario's deficit and maintain our reputation as a worldwide leader in publicly funded education now and for the future. This province is working to give Ontario families and taxpayers the certainty they deserve, while being fair to our education partners.

For those who have supported the proposed legislation, we thank you for putting Ontario students first. On behalf of Ontario's students and their families, I look forward to continuing to work with you to protect Ontario's progress in education so we can ensure that we remain focused on supporting student achievement, which is, after all, our most sustainable and valuable competitive advantage in the 21st-century world. This strong action that our government is taking is in the best interests of students and their families. It helps put students first and maintains Ontario's reputation as a worldwide leader in publicly funded education.

I think everyone knows we're working hard to protect the extraordinary gains we have made together during the past nine years. They're gains we're all very proud of and should all be very proud of.

In closing, I want to say thank you to Ontario's teachers and to those who represent them, many of whom I know by face, several of whom I know are sitting here in this Legislature. I want to thank you for your commitment to our province's two million students, for your dedication to a challenging and rewarding profession, and for working with us to get ourselves collectively through this particular period.

1440

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again, speaking to Bill 115, we're standing here, in third reading. I think I would humbly suggest that, with some authority as the only teacher sitting in the House here—

Mr. Paul Miller: There are a few others.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Are there? Oh, well, then. My apologies to my former colleagues.

I can, however, speak with some authority on education, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, we have to start back with the origins as to why this collective agreement was even put in place a year after the general election. As alluded to by the member from Timmins-James Bay, this government does nothing that actually is perceived to help Ontarians, only the Liberal agenda, and they're pushing out their agenda and personal betterment for politics and political reasons only.

So here's why we're sitting here today debating this bill that shouldn't even have been brought forward for us.

So here we are. I think I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that as a member of OSSTF in good standing—and my wife's a teacher as well, for ETFO. When I talk and listen to my former colleagues back home and across the province in different ridings as well, teachers get it. They get it. They understand the fiscal bundle that they see that we're in right now, a \$15-billion deficit this year. We're spending \$10 billion a year on our provincial debt annually. That's \$10 billion, Mr. Speaker, that can go directly into front-line health care, front-line education in the classrooms to provide the resources needed so that we do have the best students in the world.

One of the reasons I'd just like to say I'm here today is because, quite frankly, I was frustrated with the policies that this Liberal government was bringing forward in the classroom and in education. For this government to say they put students first and teachers first I think is a little misleading, to say the least. Again, the reason I'm here is because those policies that the Liberal government brought in are doing a great disservice to the young people of this province.

They say that their standards are higher, that their test scores are so much higher. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can honestly tell you that the only reason they're higher is because the standards have been brought down so low you just have to step over the ladder or the bar. You can't do the limbo, because that's how low the standards are.

The Minister of Education made a point of saying that 92% of students met or exceeded international standards. Mr. Speaker, really? Honestly, I would love to see where the reference of that statistic comes from, because I can tell you, not even in my board of Kawartha Pine Ridge did 92% of students meet or exceed international standards. So for this government to sit there and throw around numbers on how great our students and our education system are is really disheartening, and personally I can't stand it. I can't stand sitting here and listening to what this government has done.

So here we are debating this bill. All the teachers want is a fair shake. They understand, again, the financial ruin that we're facing here. They agreed to a two-year wage freeze. What they don't understand is why this government attacks teachers alone—attacks the doctors.

What we're proposing, and what we proposed, was an across-the-broader-public-sector wage freeze that was fair, equitable, and that all parties could agree upon. That would save \$2 billion for this government, to go towards the \$15 billion that they've created already.

So here we are.

The member from Timmins-James Bay pointed out that one of the other things that teachers are upset about is the fact that the collective bargaining process—he alluded to the fact that members have a right to join a union. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would argue, then, why shouldn't an individual have the right to opt out of joining a union?

Interjections.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's fair. It's freedom of choice—the individual. So, the member from Timmins—

James Bay, you have the right to join a union. You should also have the right not to join a union, to opt out.

The member from Mississauga–Streetsville made the point that hiring practices need to be looked at and reformed. I don't really understand where the member was going on that, saying that boards need to be a little more transparent. When it comes to transparency and the hiring practice in the teaching profession as a whole, I think the government has a duty, an obligation, to inform individuals who are getting their bachelor of education in this province of the opportunities that may or may not be there for them when they do come out from getting their degree in education.

There are a lot of young people, Mr. Speaker, who want to get in the classroom because they love children and the opportunities of actually seeing young minds expand, become critical thinkers and then productive citizens for not only this great province but for this nation as a whole.

I think the government needs to re-evaluate at times specifically how many job opportunities there are for young teachers coming out. If the government knows, for instance, there are 6,000 teachers retiring this year, why, then, are they allowing 10,000 students to enter into the bachelor of education programs throughout the province? That's 4,000 students who are not going to be able to find work. I think we, as a society, need to inform these young people of the shortcomings of what this does for them. Many of them are going to have to leave the province or the country to get a job. So I think we're doing a great disservice there.

Getting back to Bill 115, however: We're in this predicament again, propping up the misguided, misinformed decisions that once again this Liberal government has done, sort of like the horse racing industry. This government seems to scramble; they're very reactionary in their decisions. "Oh, I've got an idea," they implement it—and they implement it with very flowery titles, Mr. Speaker, for their bills. I mean, "Putting Students First": Honestly, who doesn't put students first? You would have to be some kind of, I don't know, degenerate ogre to not put students first.

Interjections.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They like that one.

Honestly, here we are, putting forward this flowery legislation, feel-good, like the home renovations health tax act. Here we are. The Liberals are masterminds at spinning this type of propaganda, and here we are, trying to make teachers—

Interjection: Do the honourable thing.

1450

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Working with the teachers, right? Doing what the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm having difficulty hearing the member who has the floor, and I would ask the members of the opposition and the third party to refrain from heckling him.

I return to the member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see that my colleagues to the left are paying close attention to what I have to say. They'd make very good students, Mr. Speaker. I wish my classroom was always that attentive.

Interjection.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: For attention or participation?

Anyway, this is why, again, we're propping up this government to make sure that they get the kids back in class. But, to the point, the students are already in the class.

I would like to pay some homage to the member from Timmins–James Bay. We were brought back early so that students would be in class. Then, when we get back here two weeks early—and that's fine. That's why we get paid the big dollars, Mr. Speaker: to do work here. But when we get here, the government who brings us back because there's a crisis in the classrooms brings forward motions and stalls debate on the legislation that we were brought back to debate. So, obviously, I would like to suggest and recommend that the Liberals again manufactured this crisis in the classroom because of the by-election prospects that they were facing.

Here we are again, when the NDP and the members alluded to the fact that the Liberals had done this—we can see it. We've been saying that, Mr. Speaker. I mentioned that last time we spoke to this bill, last week.

For us to sit here and waste time—literally, I would say, when there are more pressing issues facing this province like the deficit, job creation. We need to bring forward bills that are actually going to do something that's going to be positive for the people of this province, not attack a specific group or sector of workers, whether they're unionized or non-unionized. I would recommend that we move forward, looking at bills that are actually going to be productive and actually have an impact on the lives of Ontarians here today, a positive impact.

There are 600,000 Ontarians who woke up this morning who didn't have a job. I think that's a shame. We have put forward ideas to this government that are going to create more jobs—and good-paying jobs, I might add—to the province. Our one-to-one apprenticeship ratio will create 200,000 highly skilled, highly paid jobs here in the province. This is the kind of bold thinking and the kind of initiatives we need to bring forward that are actually going to do something positive here for the province of Ontario.

With that, I will bid adieu.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Do the New Democrats have more time? They do? Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It is a privilege to rise to speak on this bill today, but it is not a happy privilege. Everyone in this room, everyone watching this on television, knows that this was a bill born of opportunism. That is what is before this Legislature today.

A by-election was called in Kitchener–Waterloo and a crisis was needed to ensure that people were stampeded

in the right direction. The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, driven by the pursuit of a majority in this chamber, decided that he would create a crisis and save people from that crisis. He presented himself as someone who could be the saviour of Ontario, and so this bill was brought before us, and within 24 hours, we will have a final vote on this bill.

Everyone needs to know that this bill has already failed in its primary purpose, and that's that the Liberals did not win in Kitchener–Waterloo. So those parents and students who have had to listen to stories that school won't be opening at the beginning of the school year, those teachers and education workers who have been dragged through the mud, those who care about the education system, who have watched this incredible pressure and abuse applied to that system—you should all know that that was done for naught, that the Honourable Dalton McGuinty did not get his way in Kitchener–Waterloo.

He needs to know that when you play politics with children, when you play politics with their families, when you play politics with the women and men who educate the next generation, you are playing with fire. This blew up in his face.

It became very apparent to people across Ontario that this bill had nothing to do with putting students first and had everything to do with putting Liberals first. That's what this bill was about and is about. Reporters, columnists, commentators, journalist after journalist, wrote the lines that parent after parent, student after student, teacher after teacher understood very quickly. This was a by-election strategy and that is all that mattered.

The women and the men who every day go out and educate our children, make sure that our schools are safe, give counsel to those who are in trouble, make sure that playgrounds are cleared of glass and hypodermic needles, got the back of the Premier's hand, and that has changed this province. Perhaps not forever, but for now, this province has been changed.

In Kitchener–Waterloo, there was a last desperate blizzard of Liberal flyers last Tuesday and Wednesday telling parents that their schools would soon be closed because teachers were going to go out. You have to read that flyer, the kind of misinformation that was being pumped out to parents and families all over Kitchener–Waterloo. And the sense was that surely this would move people to vote for the Ontario Liberal Party. But in fact what it did, Speaker, was it cemented in people's minds the idea, one that had been forming over the years, that the Honourable Dalton McGuinty would do anything, say anything, for power—anything.

So this bill has failed in its primary initiative. This bill has not delivered the goods that Dalton McGuinty wanted, but, as with so many other initiatives on his part, the bill is going to be delivered to us. The costs of this bill are going to be delivered to us. And I want to talk a bit about those costs, what they are and what this province will bear for years to come. There will be legal costs; there's the damage to the reputation of the education system and those who work within it; there's

the demoralization of those who work in the system and raise and educate our children; there's damage to respect for the law; and there's ongoing undermining of the authority of school boards.

1500

Let me talk first about the legal costs, because this matter came up very early on. A number of years ago, a British Columbia government acted arbitrarily and overruled the democratic rights of people organized in that province to negotiate and come to an agreement between workers and employers. The workers in British Columbia did not accept that their rights could be crushed like that. They took the government to court, and the Supreme Court of Canada found that a complete disregard for democratic rights, a failure to respect the Constitution and an undermining of the rule of law was something that could not stand. So that law was thrown out, and the province of British Columbia was assessed damages in the tens of millions of dollars. Here in Ontario, comparable numbers would generate damage costs in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Earlier this year, the Premier, his Minister of Finance and others in the Liberal cabinet spoke about problems with the wage freeze ideas and bills being put forward by the opposition. They said they were dangerous, they were reckless and they would incur huge costs for the province of Ontario. And yet they adopted those ideas. I'll say this for the Conservatives: They're right. The Liberals are finally picking up on their program. They're right about that.

In the course of debate over the last few weeks, I asked the Minister of Education to table the legal opinion showing that things were fine constitutionally; not that that would have made me feel this was a good bill, but at least to show that the government had done its homework. No legal opinion has been tabled. But as everyone in this House is aware, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has spoken up to say that, should this bill pass, should there be an action, they want to be interveners because they believe this bill is unconstitutional—violates the rights of the people of Ontario. When we violate the rights of one group, we put at risk the rights of all groups.

Speaker, we don't know what this reckless and cynical gamble with public policy will cost us, but my colleague from Timmins–James Bay said earlier—and he was right—that it is entirely possible that it will be a different government that has to deal with the fallout from all of this. This government—actually, the Honourable Dalton McGuinty—is very happy to gamble with public money and let others pick up the bill. Is this the work of an honourable man?

I want to talk about damage to reputations: to the reputations of those who work in the education system and to the education system's reputation. We are in a difficult time for families across Ontario. People face difficulty getting work. If they have jobs, they face difficulty with the stability of their workplace. There is a lot of anger, and there are a lot of different ways you can

deal with that anger. You can address the circumstances that generate it, and you can address people's understanding of what is going on. But when you go after people who work with our children and educate them, you do them a disservice.

I want to point out to people right now that if you think back to your interactions with teachers, with custodians, with the office administrators you have known over the years, my guess is, you will find many memories of interactions that made a difference in your life.

When my son was in grade 2, the teacher came to me and said, "Your son has a reading problem, a learning disability." I found it very difficult to accept, because he was in grade 2. He was a young kid. He had a lot of life ahead of him. She was very comforting. She made sure that he got into a special reading unit, encouraged me to buy whatever comic book he loved so that I could get him to try and read. She gave me that encouragement, and the reality is, she cared about what happened to my son, and my son got the support he needed.

There are people out there who can tell stories of being called by the administrators in their school's office, being told their child is sick or has been injured, and that administrator is caring for that child until that parent—worried, concerned—gets to the school and gets their child.

These are the people whom we trust with our children every day. They are not the people who are causing the financial crisis in Ontario. They cannot be blamed for causing that financial crisis. They should, in fact, be recognized for being willing to sit down and work through with the representatives of the provincial government to try and find an agreement that everyone can live with, to be creative, to look at the potential to rework benefits or the administration of benefits to save the province money, to look at how things can be done differently, so that the financial problems the province faces and the fair treatment that the teachers and education workers deserve can be matched together.

That didn't happen. As we are all aware, the Premier's main communication with those who work in our schools was a YouTube clip. Talk to those who tried to negotiate with this Liberal administration. Talk to the hand because they weren't going to talk back. Talk over here.

Speaker, when people try, on a good-faith basis, understanding the situation the province faces, to actually find a creative solution and are turned away, when they are treated with disrespect and, then, when they are blamed in the media, in public, in speeches, for the problems this province faces, when it's said to parents, "You can have small classrooms or smaller class sizes as long as we can cut your teacher's pay. You can have all-day kindergarten as long as we cut back on custodians, early childhood educators, office administrators. As long as we can cut their pay, you can have anything you want," you're setting up a conflict between those families and those who educate our children. You do a disservice to the people who work in our education system, and you

undermine the credibility of that system. That is not honourable, Speaker. It is not honourable at all.

I, like many of my colleagues, go door to door in my riding. I talk to people at the door, and I get a sense of the houses they live in, the apartments they live in, and I have to say to you, Speaker, that the attacks on people who work in education, as if they were the ones who lived in the largest mansions in this province, who drove the biggest cars, who had the most expensive clothing—to set up this sort of antagonism, portraying education workers and teachers as the privileged who had to be taken on for the rest of us, does them and does this province a disservice. That treatment is not deserved.

1510

I want to talk about the demoralization. I had a reporter ask me about this the other day: "Why would you say that teachers and education workers are not being well treated?" Speaker, I would ask you and anyone who is watching and anyone in this chamber to think about your experience dealing with a bad boss, a boss who, for a while says you're doing fine work and then, for reasons unknown to you, suddenly becomes cranky, snappish, diminishes everything you do, says that it's not good enough. What sort of atmosphere do you have in a workplace like that? Think about how you feel when unjustly, after having done the work that needs to be done for so long, you're suddenly turned on. There's disrespect. There's insult. There's a lack of willingness to work things through. Speaker, the impact of that is demoralization of people who work hard.

My sense is, because education workers and teachers come to my constituency office on the Danforth and talk to me, that they will do everything they can and need to do to look after the children that are in their care. But without a doubt, Speaker, any of us who have worked for a bad boss knows that it makes it harder. It simply makes it harder.

Today in Ontario, we found out that the Honourable Dalton McGuinty is not a good boss. He does not treat the people who work in our education system fairly.

Speaker, we've seen disrespect for the education system, for those who work in it, for families and for parents. But I want to talk about another element of this bill before us, and that is the undermining of respect for law itself, because not everyone has actually read through this bill. People need to know that the labour board, which was set up to provide decisions on labour law in Ontario, to fairly balance the arguments of all those who come before that labour board, has been given instructions. When it comes to this act, the labour board is to enforce the act. But for those who have issues, questions, concerns, who want to use the law to defend themselves—they're out of luck.

Interjection: The rules don't apply.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The rules are gone. The Labour Relations Act, the labour board, has been reshaped so that it's one-sided; it is not fair. Education workers and teachers cannot get a fair hearing by reason of law.

One of the fundamentals in this society is that we can depend on the law to put everyone on an equal footing. This bill undermines that. The Employment Standards Act has been suspended when it comes to people who work in the education sector, those who may have received an increase at the beginning of September. The law has been suspended so that, in fact, a practice that is not allowed, and that's a clawback, is now allowed—is now allowed. Extraordinary. If you work in the education system, the Employment Standards Act, in part, has been negated for you.

Speaker, there are going to be people this fall teaching in high schools who will have to go through the curriculum and talk about the fair administration of the law and how, after centuries, in our country we have the rule of law, equality before the law. They will have to answer questions about, “Well, is there really equality before the law or are some people dealt out?” With this legislation before us, a very large number of people will be dealt out of that fairness. They will not have defence. The defence will have been erased.

Speaker, this law continues a process of eliminating the power of local boards of education. Some people like their trustees; some don't. But across Ontario, eastern Ontario, northern Ontario, southwestern Ontario, people feel that their board of education should respond to them, that they should have voice and say—impact on the conditions of education in their community. Increasingly, that is being taken away, and I would say that loss of local control is of great consequence to parents, to families across this province.

Do you actually want every question about out-of-district children settled in this legislative chamber? Did we decide that becoming a trustee was our next move forward in being members of provincial Parliament? I say that's a huge loss.

If in fact we want local control, then we cannot consistently rip local control out of the hands of boards of education. We cannot say that everything is best settled in downtown Toronto, in the Ministry of Education, in the minister's office. No matter how good that minister may be, no matter how honourable that minister may be, you don't want everything decided in this room for the whole province. You will have no flexibility, no local responsiveness.

Speaker, the treatment of our children has not been honourable. The treatment of teachers and education workers has not been honourable.

It is not too late for the Progressive Conservative Party to say, “We are not voting for this bill,” and for them to say, “We're not going to prop up these Liberals anymore. We're not going to bail them out anymore.”

Mr. Bill Walker: Did you do that in the budget, by any chance?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I find it very interesting. I find it very interesting—

Interjection: Come on.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I say to the official opposition: Don't lose this opportunity. Now is the time. Don't vote for them, and let this bill die.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It's a pleasure to get up again to speak on Bill 115. It has been an honour and a privilege for me to not only have this position that I have, but to have been on the social policy committee when we discussed this bill.

I'd like to thank, first and foremost, the member from Nepean—Carleton, the critic for education, and our leader, Tim Hudak, for the leadership they took on this file, and it was a privilege for me to even be part of that. I'd also like to thank everybody who was there on the committee, because it is a daunting task. We are all very passionate and sit in the seats we sit because we believe in what we believe in. To listen and respect others and their opinions is a wonderful opportunity, and I am very grateful for that opportunity.

The wonderful thing about sitting there is that you have the opportunity to hear everybody come in—as much as we could. It was a very crammed, fast process. But the people who did come in are as passionate as we are, sitting there, trying to get their points across—because it is very frustrating when you feel that you've come to deaf ears. We all understand that you can only negotiate something when there are able negotiators, and when you can't, you do fall on deaf ears. A leader who doesn't have negotiation skills because all he's done is throw things at every problem with no output of what was thrown into the pocket of all the monies that were given out, creates chaos. And as we can see here today, we have chaos once again.

1520

The number one thing I know in my household, when running my budget, is that when you lose control of your finances, you lose control of your destiny. We have lost control of that. How unfortunate that we are even in the position we are in on the backs of the taxpayers. When we had people come in and sit down and speak, they talked about all the things they were looking to get, and rightly so. I mean, when you are the Premier of Ontario, you have an obligation to sit down and listen to the parties at hand and to be under one roof in that room. You don't continue, after nine years, to vilify one against the other, and you don't put people in a position to feel as frustrated as we feel sitting across as opposition when we're trying to get answers from the government, which we can't get. I clearly understand the frustration that everybody feels right now. You feel like your hands are tied and there is absolutely nothing you can do to change that environment.

But people say to me, “Jane, where's the clarity? Jane, what's the rhetoric? What are we trying to do? We're so confused.” I could clearly understand that when we knocked on doors in Kitchener—Waterloo. People were so confused at what was going on. I understood and sympathized with them, because I thought to myself, “My gosh, I've been here 11 months, almost a year, and it's so frustrating for me to be in the process here, to try to understand what exactly is going on.” The majority of

times, we don't know, because there is such chaos all the time, and smoke and mirrors constantly, that nobody really knows what's going on. You really have to sit down and be grateful for your colleagues who give you clarification on what exactly has transpired so you can go out, when you're knocking on doors, and people can understand what is actually going on.

When you look at Kitchener–Waterloo, knocking on doors there, and all of a sudden we had Vaughan come up, I had a fellow at the door the other day say to me, “What was the purpose of that?” I said, “Well, the reality was that we have to go over to Vaughan to knock on doors,” but at the end of the day, it's to say, “Well, you know what? I lost there, but I won there.” It's just smoke and mirrors. Reality is reality. You only needed to win there to get a majority. It had nothing to do with Vaughan.

The bottom line for us was that we wanted to make sure the government did not become a majority, and we are eternally grateful that we all worked as hard as we possibly could so that we didn't have that happen to us. I am very grateful for that.

But I want to say—again, back to the process of talking about Bill 115, as the opposition party—our leader, Tim Hudak, went to speak to the Premier in November, if I'm correct in saying that, and was given a frosty few minutes, 20 minutes or whatever, to talk about that situation across the board to have a plan. Then again, MPP Jeff Yurek here brought a bill forward in May for an across-the-board wage freeze to bring some clarity, so people could understand what we were doing to move forward.

We don't want to leave it to your children, your grandchildren, my children, my grandchildren to inherit this mess. We have an opportunity that's been entrusted to us by Ontarians to make this the best place it could possibly be. If it's not symbolic enough for you that we are receiving equalization payments for the very first time in our entire lives, then what else is there to say? We have to understand that we are in terrible shape. With all the smoke and mirrors that go on all the time, people don't understand how bad it actually is. We spend \$1.8 million more an hour than we take in, and 20% of it is borrowed money that we're spending to pay toward that. We spend \$10 billion on the interest on the debt every year. So if we spend 1% more, and the interest goes up, that's \$500 million that we could be giving to front-line health care, to the education of the teachers, to get things better instead of always—nothing has gotten any better.

We're at a place right now after nine years where we're patronized and constantly spoken to across here about, “Well, it just is what it is.” Well, it's not, “It is what it is.” You took advantage of the taxpayers and spent money on eHealth for \$1 billion, Ornge for \$1 billion, closed two plants for two votes—roughly, it's \$500 million, but it won't be that; it's going to be so much more. On top of all that, we have our green FIT program that we're all subsidizing from our homes which is double on our bill for global adjustment. For seniors that can't even pay their hydro bills—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much for your presentation. Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to join the debate here on Bill 115 this afternoon. I found the remarks from the member for Toronto–Danforth quite interesting, because I think what we discovered is that his short-term memory is in very good shape—he's been telling us about the by-election that was just a few days ago. His long-term memory, unfortunately, isn't quite so acute—

Interjection: Selective.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: It's a bit selective. What he doesn't seem to remember is the social contract. I remember the social contract. I was a school board trustee. I remember the legislation which actually overrode existing collective agreements, not stepping in as they expire. I remember a solution that involved getting rid of 5% of all the teachers in the province of Ontario. I remember a solution that resulted in class sizes throughout Ontario rising. But apparently the member for Toronto–Danforth doesn't remember that.

His medium-term memory seems to be a little bit shaky as well, because he seems to have conveniently not noticed that we've had a worldwide recession. If we've learned one thing from that global—

Interjections.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Don't tell me the recession doesn't matter, because if we learned one thing from the recession, it's that—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please take your seat.

I can't hear the member for Guelph. I would ask the New Democrats to come to order.

Member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Speaker.

We learned that debt matters and that we need to deal with the provincial deficit. We need to deal with matters of provincial debt.

So when we engaged Don Drummond to say, “Okay, how do we do this?” He came back in the education sector and talked about things like getting rid of full-day kindergarten, which of course means getting rid of teachers, and increasing class sizes, which of course means getting rid of teachers. In fact, he came right out and said, “Lay off 10,000 teachers, and lay off 10,000 education workers. That will let you solve your problem of financing the education sector.” We said, “No, we're not going to be like the NDP and raise class sizes and get rid of teachers. We're going to do it a different way.” That means that we all need to work together.

In fact, we did manage to work together with the English Catholic teachers and with the francophone teachers, because when we started, we said, “Not only do we want the salary to be frozen, we also want movement on the grid to be frozen.” We worked with the members of those two unions, and came up with a deal where they made some concessions in terms of financing for some other things and for taking some days off in the second

year. We said, "Okay, then we'll have the movement on the grid that the young teachers depend on, which sees the junior teachers continuing to get some salary increases." So, in fact, negotiations did take place, and they resulted in those teachers' unions with whom we were able to conclude agreements getting some of the things that they identified as important to them.

1530

I mentioned this whole idea of debt. One of the things that perhaps not everyone understands is that the debt and unfunded liabilities of school boards become part of the provincial debt and part of the unfunded liability of the province. If you look at school boards, they have two major sources of debt and unfunded liability. The first is retirement gratuities; the second is banked sick days. Those are the other two key components of this agreement that is laid out in Bill 115.

We're not dealing with retirement gratuities and sick leave issues because we want to be mean to teachers. We're doing it because that unfunded liability reflects back on the province, and we must deal with the provincial debt.

The issue of retirement gratuities varies greatly from board to board. The board in which I happened to have been a trustee had in fact grandfathered or negotiated retirement gratuities out for both its elementary and secondary teachers, so that I don't hear a lot about retirement gratuities. The sick leave issue is very important to the teachers in my community, and I find that there's a lot of confusion. The new sick leave plan is the sick leave plan that members of the public service who work directly for the Ontario government have; that is, members of the Ontario public service who are our direct employees.

I was talking to somebody who works in the hospital sector the other night. It's the same plan that people who work in the hospital sector already have. So we have a lot of experience with this plan.

It involves one sick day per month, which in the case of teachers is 10 days because they work the 10 months they're at work. I understand you do a lot of work in the summer, but sick days don't particularly play into that. But it also provides—and this is the piece of information that seems to have gotten lost. This plan also provides up to 120 days of short-term sick leave. So the panic that people are in, that if they have a serious illness they're going to be without pay, isn't actually true. If there is a serious illness, in fact the short-term sick leave can kick in for 120 days, and those people who are in the sector would know that at that point long-term leave kicks in. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate? Further debate?

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Wednesday, September 5, 2012, I am now required to put the question.

Ms. Broten has moved third reading of Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bill.

I have received a deferral notice, signed by the chief government whip, asking that the vote be deferred. As such, this vote will be deferred until tomorrow after question period during the time set aside for deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has withdrawn his late show request filed last Wednesday, September 5.

AMBULANCE AMENDMENT ACT (AIR AMBULANCES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES AMBULANCES (SERVICES D'AMBULANCE AÉRIENS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 6, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ambulances en ce qui concerne les services d'ambulance aériens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this bill, the member for Oxford had the floor, and as such, we are now asking for questions and comments with respect to the presentation made by the member for Oxford. Questions and comments?

Further debate? Does anybody wish to debate Bill 50? The member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It pleases me to rise to speak to Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services. It should have the tag-on "and to take the heat off the Minister of Health and this present government." That should be what it reads at the end of that.

Mr. Speaker, in doing my research for today I'd like to draw your attention to a news release from the Auditor General of Ontario dated March 21, 2012. What it says is, "The Ontario government has given Ornge \$700 million since 2006 to provide ambulance service in the province without sufficiently monitoring how well Ornge was doing its job or whether it was following appropriate public sector business practices, Auditor General Jim McCarter said today on the release of a special report entitled Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services."

It also says in this that the ministry didn't follow proper procedures when they were looking at Ornge, and they had the ability to do so. This is clearly a mess that the government has made by itself, and that's why they brought Bill 50 forward; to try to take some heat off what they didn't do where it concerns Ornge.

It said: "When it assigned the operation of Ontario's air ambulance service to Ornge, the Ministry of Health

and Long-Term Care said that it would set standards and monitor Ornge's performance against those standards to ensure fiscal and patient-care accountability." Obviously, that wasn't done, even though red flags were being put up that something was going wrong with Ornge, and yet the present Minister of Health chose not to acknowledge those red flags.

My colleague the member from Newmarket–Aurora has led the charge in the public accounts committee to get to the bottom of this scandal. His diligence uncovering the mess goes above and beyond anything that Bill 50 has to offer.

This government was warned about financial irregularities and compromised patient care at Ornge. They were repeatedly warned about this, and what did they do? Nothing. They did not respond to the many red flags that were raised.

At the public accounts committee, we have heard from witness after witness about the financial mismanagement at Ornge. We've also heard about the questionable business practices that went on there. Most frightening of all, however, is what we have heard about how the lives of patients were put at risk. Actually, Ornge purchased helicopters that didn't even allow paramedics to adequately do their job; they couldn't administer CPR.

1540

The Minister of Health claims that she did not have the authority to exercise proper oversight at Ornge. She said the performance agreement was weak and that it wasn't adequate. The Auditor General clearly disputes that. It was her government that signed this performance agreement, and it is disingenuous for them now to say they that didn't have the proper authority to act. Bill 50 is a little too late.

The Ornge scandal is one in a long list of things that this government has mismanaged. They spent over \$190 million to cancel a power plant in Mississauga in order to save Liberal seats. The bill hasn't come in yet for the Oakville power plant cancellation, another Liberal seat-saver program. Then there is the eHealth scandal, with millions more taxpayers' dollars wasted. We currently have around 600,000 people out of work in this province. We have hydro rates that are soaring, and the Auditor General tells us that by 2015, hydro rates will be up by 46%. Then there's the Samsung deal, the health care premium and cancellation of the slots-at-racetracks program, and it goes on.

This reckless spending for the past nine years at Queen's Park has to end. We've run out of money to throw at the problems created by this present government.

What is the record of this government? An exodus of manufacturing jobs, three credit downgrades, soaring hydro rates, increased unemployment, increased spending and increased taxes.

Bill 50 cannot fix this government's Ornge scandal. That's what they're trying to do with it. They're trying to fix a problem that runs far deeper than what this legislation does.

Speaker, there are some other things that the Auditor General said in his report of March 21. It says that one of Ornge's subsidiary companies bought a building for \$15 million to be used as Ornge's head office and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate that an independent appraiser retained by the Auditor General said was 40% higher than the fair market value. This enabled the subsidiary company to obtain \$24 million in financing for the building. The \$9-million difference between \$24 million and \$15 million was intended to be flowed to a related for-profit company that at the time of the audit was controlled by Ornge management. Again, if the government and the Minister of Health had looked at the red flags that were being thrown up, a lot of this could have been stopped.

In addition to the \$700 million provided by the ministry, Ornge borrowed almost \$300 million, primarily to finance the purchase of helicopters and airplanes and its new head office. Although Ornge's own analysis indicated nine helicopters and six airplanes were needed, Ornge purchased 12 new helicopters and 10 new planes. Ornge is repaying this debt using provincial funding it gets to provide ambulance services.

Ornge also received government funding to secure a land ambulance service to transport a projected 20,000 patients a year, starting in 2008. Instead, the land service transported only about 15% of the projected number, at an average per-patient cost that was nearly as high as the cost to transport a patient by air.

This bill is, as I said, a little bit too late in its coming. Actually, it's a bill that probably didn't even have to be there. If you read the bill over, it spells out certain things the government can do to help with their investigation of this ministry. However, it is well documented through the committee meetings that the way of investigating what was going on at Ornge was already there and it was neglected; it was let go. Unfortunately, there were precious dollars in the health ministry that went to support this helicopter service, the ambulance service, and it was wasted. It was wasted. This was taxpayers' money that was just wasted, and it's too bad.

The people at Ornge—the ordinary pilots, the ordinary people at Ornge—just want to do a good job. They're committed to doing that, and they've been tied up in this scandal. Now we have a piece of legislation that's been introduced in order to take the heat off this government for their mismanagement of this whole file.

It's too bad that, back a number of years ago, the government didn't take seriously what has going on at Ornge. We brought this to the attention of the minister a couple of years ago, and it was not acknowledged.

Again, we have a piece of legislation that's a smoke-screen this government is trying to throw up in front of this Legislature and, indeed, trying to get the good people of Ontario to believe the government is actually doing something to get over this scandal.

Those dollars are gone. We're not going to get them back again. At the cost of health care and the dollars we need to run that ministry, it's really too bad that things weren't done a few years ago.

This is just one of a group of scandals this government has been involved with. For some reason, over nine years they just haven't gotten a lot of things right—billions of dollars of the taxpayers' money wasted to go toward projects we should have been working on in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to comment on the comments of the member for Perth-Wellington.

G50 is an act to amend the Ambulance Act, hopefully to prevent further Ornge. But along with changing the act, you also have to have the intent to change, and it's up for debate whether the government really has the intent. If they had the intent, they would have included freedom of information under G50. G50 would have had the scrutiny of the Ombudsman. That's something that if you're going to change it anyway, let's do our best job and do it right. But that wasn't included.

Something else that's telling, from our position: If the government really wanted to clear this up quickly, then what was stopping the Premier from going in front of the committee and, if everything was fine, giving his version? That would have solved—a lot of people had misgivings. If the Premier, in his position, had gone in front of this committee and answered questions, it would have cleared the air considerably and we could have moved on to other things. But now the Ornge scandal still hangs in the air.

We in this corner of the House want to move on and make things better for Ontarians. The way to do that, if you're facing a scandal, is to face up to it, open the doors and move on. Deep down, this amendment doesn't achieve that. Is it better than it was before? Yes. Is it solving the problem? No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Pickering-Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: First of all, I do want to assure the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane that this government is very much committed to increasing accountability under Bill 50, the Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances). I'd like, if I may, to briefly speak to the key points in this legislation that will help us move forward and increase the accountability that I think members opposite are looking for.

To recap in terms of what is key to this legislation, it provides for the appointment of a supervisor or special investigator where air ambulance service is not being operated in the public interest. It allows the minister to give directives to air ambulance service providers, like at a hospital. It prescribes performance measures and standards. It allows the ministry to establish terms that are deemed to be included in a performance agreement between the ministry and the air ambulance service provider. It also requires appointment of provincial reps on the air ambulance provider's board. That's very key to transparency and accountability. Further, it provides whistle-blower protections for those who disclose information to an inspector, investigator or the ministry. It

also provides a means for the current air ambulance provider, Ornge, to become a provincially incorporated organization, which will even further increase accountability of the organization.

1550

It's important to note that this legislation will apply to Ornge's critical care land ambulances but will not impact municipal land ambulance services. The current proposal is the best option to allow us to move forward swiftly while not disrupting seamless patient care and to allow the good employees of Ornge to continue their good work in the best interests of Ontarians and the health care they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's interesting to hear the need, all of a sudden, for this bill. I sat in on a few of the committee meetings, and the executive was very clear: The oversight was there. They asked a very simple question: "Do you think we would have been here, or continue to work through, if they stopped paying our salaries?" If they stopped paying Chris Mazza \$1.4 million, would he have been there or would he have listened to what their concerns were? The problems were, they ignored the whistle-blowers. The meetings they had with Ornge—they were very clear that they made sure that this government knew of their plans. But no, they didn't listen and they didn't get involved, especially in an election year; they didn't want these details to come out. It was only when the Toronto Star reported it after the election that they finally had to take action. Then we sit here and they complain about delaying this bill. For months, they failed to call it for debate. If they were truly serious—or again, were they afraid to have this brought up during something as simple as the by-election? This government has been hiding behind the paperwork or this legislation trying to gain some credibility that they had no oversight.

First of all, if they didn't have the oversight it's the failing of the Liberal government, because they actually instituted Ornge and put the oversight in place. Now they basically are saying that they failed in that oversight as well. But it's time that the government started to look at some of the scandals and the waste. Just think of the money that this waste would pay in the line of health services. Instead, it's all a smoke-and-mirrors diversion. While they should be getting down to this and actually getting at government and making a difference or picking a fight with one of 4,000 public service agreements, you've just got to wonder about where they're going or if they really have the backbone to do what's right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Whenever we approach government Bill G50, or any time we talk about Ornge, the government wants to say, "We have G50. Let's just vote on G50." This has been addressed, and I want to reiterate this because it's a very important message. Anyone can fix a problem once a problem has come to light. Once you see a problem and you say, "Okay, I can fix it"—

that's not what we're talking about. We want to catch the problem before it becomes a scandal. That's really why we have the Ornge inquiry; that's really why we have an extensive process with the committee: because we want to have a process whereby it's not the Toronto Star or the media that exposes a problem and then the government reacts. We don't want a reactionary government; we want a government that provides proper oversight so that these types of scandals don't occur in the first place and so they're caught early, not after the fact. We can do as much as we want now and make the strongest performance agreement in the world; we can take all the precautions now, but there's nothing in G50 that ensures that another Ornge-type scandal won't occur in another area of the ministry. That's really the heart of the question. That's really the essence of what we want to get to. We want to create a mechanism that we respond to red flags that are raised, whether it's by the third party or whether it's raised by the official opposition. We also want to be able to respond to whistle-blowers. If there are any red flag or any indication of a problem, the government should respond early to prevent precious resources from being wasted, not after the fact once has been exposed: "Now we're ready to put forward a bill that's going to prevent anything from happening in the future." That's not good enough. We need to find out how the government failed to oversee and prevent this from happening in the first place. That's why it's essential that we continue with further committee hearings to get to the bottom of this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments.

The member for Perth—Wellington has two minutes to reply, if he chooses to do so.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members from Timiskaming—Cochrane, Pickering—Scarborough East, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry and Bramalea—Gore—Malton. Gosh, I guess we're going to have some changes in ridings. I hope we can get these names squished down a little bit. It might be easier to remember them all.

I said in my statement, when I first started, that this is a bill that, in my opinion, just tries to take the heat off this government and the Minister of Health. It is also trying to take the heat off the Premier himself. The Premier has refused to testify at these hearings, and that's unfortunate. The leader of the Liberal government, the Premier of Ontario, shouldn't be holding anything back, in my opinion. If he has something to say, he should be there, and it's very unfortunate that's not happening.

This bill is a smokescreen; that's all it is. I read through the bill. A lot of things in the bill are already in place, as far as oversight goes. It was there, and the minister, the government, chose to ignore it, hoping it would go away. It went away with millions and millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that could have gone to front-line health care to hire nurses, hire doctors. But that money is gone. As far as I know, Mr. Mazza has not repaid any money, and whether that's ever going to

happen, who knows? In my opinion, this is just a smoke-screen for this government: "Please take the heat off of us right now. We don't want to have to deal with Ornge anymore." That's what this bill is designed to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

M. Taras Natyshak: Je suis content d'être ici aujourd'hui pour ce débat, ce discours important sur le projet de loi G-50, that will deal with the Ambulance Amendment Act—from what we have experienced in our term in this House as one of the biggest scandals we've seen so far. This outweighs, I think, even eHealth. Although it might not be the same in terms of monetary impact—we know eHealth bilked taxpayers about \$2 billion, billions—this really strikes to the heart of our confidence in the government to manage one of the most fundamental aspects of our health care system: the transport of those who are in critical condition to hospitals from accidents in incident areas. What they've done is they have abdicated their responsibility in that role, first and foremost, which I think is where we can pinpoint where the problem started.

They said—and I'll commend them on this—"We're not competent enough to deal with the transportation of patients, so we're going to outsource it." That's something that right from the outset we think was a mistake, but obviously, they realized that their health minister at the time may not have had the ability within their own ministry or within themselves.

Secondly, what happened is that the deal that was brokered to provide transportation services for critically ill patients was brokered in the backrooms of the Liberal Party, with insiders who were architects of not only this deal, but many others. Alfred Apps, again, was a long-time head of the Liberal Party. He was the president of the Liberal Party. He's well known within this House. He's well known within the federal party as well. He was there; it's on the books. He actually got paid a lot to be able to broker this deal. You wonder who ultimately benefited. We know that it wasn't the patients who had to wait hours and hours for helicopters that didn't come and fixed-wing aircraft that didn't have the capability to transport folks. Now we know, thanks to an effective opposition, an opposition that has never relented on the quest to find some truth here—

Mr. Robert Bailey: We're working together.

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Mr. Taras Natyshak: Absolutely. I commend the Conservative members as well. I've seen them operate in committee, and they've asked pointed questions. They've asked for the minister to do the honourable thing time and time again, as my honourable friend from Northumberland—Quinte West says so eloquently. But they've also asked the Premier to testify at committee, which he has reluctantly—refused to do.

What we are seeing now is a bill come forward as a reactive measure, in hindsight, and of course, hindsight is 20/20, but that is how this government deals with every big-ticket item, and actually smaller ticket items that face

the people of this province. You know what they're good at? They're good at getting it right the second time or maybe the third time, but we can never trust that they'll get it right the first time. Here we are: G50 is a "get it right the second time" bill: "Here are some of the issues that our insiders missed when they brokered this deal."

One of them is certainly that Bill 50 will provide whistle-blower protection. You would think that when you're going to hand \$250 million to a guy who hires his front-line staff from wakeboarding schools, you'd want to provide some whistle-blower protection.

There are massive things that are missing, of course. Still, to this date, despite the questions that come from the opposition members, there will not be the ability for Ornge to be subject to freedom-of-information requests, one of the most basic tenets of a transparent democracy: the ability for us to ask questions and get answers and compel you to give us those answers. But, again, that is excluded from this G50 bill.

Ornge will, of course, not be an organization that can be called to government agencies. That, again, is through the conscious construct of the Liberal Party, the minister and those who have been instrumental in building or putting together this bill, G50.

But what we really want and what we've asked for is a government that owns up to its responsibility, not just for fixing the problem. I've said this time and time again to the minister: It's not enough to take responsibility for fixing the problem. We can all do that here, with hindsight; we will all have the ability to do that. But it's not enough to take responsibility for fixing the problem. You have to take responsibility for creating it in the first place; you absolutely have to.

I submit to you, honourable members of the government side, that one of the most important lessons you should learn from last Thursday is that the public is prepared to hear that you've made mistakes. They're prepared to hear that issues within your government, within your bureaucracy, don't work as well as you would like. What they don't want is distraction and diffusion and deflection of the true issue, which is, here, at the heart of the Ornge air ambulance scandal, that you put someone in place to head up that important, vital program who only wanted to pad their pocket, who was not looking out for the best interests of Ontarians, who did not have a focus on playing the important role that air ambulance and emergency transportation should play.

It should be a cautionary tale, not only within Ornge but within all other ministries you're prepared to out-source and divest to, because you're handing over the reins of really, truly important programs without any accountability, without any frameworks of transparency. That certainly is something that our side, as New Democrats, are concerned about and continue to sound the alarm on: the fact that you're building these contracts that will potentially jeopardize further the fiscal capacity of this province.

They blamed the accountability agreement on everyone else but themselves. They said from the outset that

the performance agreement didn't have those mechanisms built in. But through committee we heard, time and time again, that at any point the government could have intervened, should have intervened but did not and failed to do that. Then they blamed the opposition for not asking those questions, as if we were the ones who initiated the program in the first place. This, in spite of questions we asked dating back to 2010. Our former leader, Howard Hampton, asked, I believe, on the order of a couple of dozen questions that hit at the heart of the transparency and accountability that was lacking, and your minister at that time did not have any answers whatsoever, so she was in the dark—she was either in the dark purposely or truly did not know.

All the more reason to continue to highlight the ineptitude of this government when it comes to those critical issues and those critical systems that we all need to play a part in the delivery of our health care system, that it shouldn't be tampered with, it shouldn't be messed with and it certainly shouldn't be given to fly-by-night—pardon the pun—organizations that don't have any credibility, who certainly don't want to be accountable with public dollars and ultimately lead to disastrous results, not only again for the public purse, but for those Ontarians that have now lost confidence in our ability. God forbid you should be in an accident and have to wait for an air ambulance that doesn't come or is late, and it costs you your life. That's what we're talking about here: the ability to build a program to deliver those services with accountability, transparency and performance that I think a government that is on the job can do.

I'll tell you, I don't have any hesitation telling you that our critic for health, France Gélinas, would make a fantastic Minister of Health, and I can tell you for certain that her ability to provide oversight would be—she'd be on the job, you'd want her on the job and, in fact, you should be happy that she is on the job because she has played an instrumental role bringing about some of these issues and helping you potentially fix them, we hope.

I look forward to the day where our health minister is on the job and provides that tangible oversight that obviously was lacking back when this deal was constructed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I listened very carefully to the remarks from the member from Essex, and I appreciate his remarks in general dealing with the Ornge air ambulance. But the focus today is on the bill. We're still doing second reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services.

The government introduced this bill back on March 21, 2012. Here we are on September 10, 2012, still doing second reading debate and not bringing this bill yet into committee where we can make changes to the bill, amend it and bring in the public to speak to the bill, then bring it back here—maybe it's amended—so that we can have third reading debate on this.

Part of the problem is that the focus has been on the public accounts committee and the questioning of various witnesses. I appreciate the work they're doing, but I think the government is taking two important steps that have not been recognized by the opposition. First of all, quite a while back, the Minister of Health requested the OPP to investigate this incident, and the investigation is still ongoing. I think that's important to realize. The other focus has been on the public accounts committee and the work they're doing there.

But the most important thing is to focus on Bill 50, the bill that was introduced quite a while back by the Minister of Health. It deals with the air ambulance act. It brings very important amendments forward, amendments that are much needed. I think the most important one, in my view—one of the most important ones—is to allow special investigators to investigate and report on activities of a designated air ambulance service provider.

Let's get this bill into committee and discuss it there.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise to the member from Essex's comments today. I guess there's a little bit of confusion around this particular piece of legislation and who is actually blocking it. I understand this was the second bill actually called in this Parliament. I can tell you that I don't think I've seen any signs from my colleagues, or from the third party, that this was actually blocked by anyone. I'm just trying to figure why they keep answering that in their questions. I'd like a nice clarification from the government members, when they actually get up and debate: How did we actually block this bill that they keep referring to?

Obviously, we know there were really serious problems at Ornge; we all agree on that. We on this side of the House agreed to a select committee. I think the government members agreed that that would happen, and a majority of this House agreed that there would be a select committee. That has never happened. We keep hearing comments from the public accounts committee. They say, "Well, you know, you blocked the bill in the House." I just need that explanation. Someone please explain to me how we have blocked that bill. I think it's important that the audience and the people at home know how the third party and the opposition would actually do that in this House.

It has been some time now. We are finally debating it. Quite frankly, people in my constituency talk to me all the time. I listen to them about their concerns, and one of the concerns they have is to get to the bottom of the scandal around Ornge. Even after public accounts, even after Bill 50, I still think we need the select committee. I think that's something this House agreed to, and for the sake of the citizens of Ontario, and probably up to a billion dollars in expenditures now, I still think the proper thing to do is to have that select committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My comments on the statement made by my colleague from Essex—my colleague from Essex is right. This bill may have some elements that are useful in it, but in the end, this bill doesn't put a requirement for freedom of information into Ornge, it doesn't give the Ombudsman jurisdiction and it doesn't give the agencies committee the ability to call Ornge before that committee: three major tools for public accountability, three major tools that would allow people to probe for problems, that would allow politicians from all three parties to say, "We've got a problem with this operation. We need to step into it. We need to get at the heart of it." That isn't allowed in this bill.

We've just gone through—sorry, we are going through what has been a searing experience on this organization. We have had extensive hearings. I agree there should have been a select committee; we voted in favour of that. Nonetheless, we've had hearings that, even in their limited format, brought forward information that I think was disturbing to people across this province—certainly, right around this Legislature.

I hope that when this bill goes to committee, when this bill is amended, that the necessary safeguards of freedom of information, Ombudsman oversight and making sure this organization can be called to the agencies committee are incorporated into the act, because in the end, this problem will reproduce itself, either with this organization or another part of the government in future, without those safeguards.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to speak in support of Bill 50 and to respond to the comments of the member for Essex.

As somebody who has been sitting on the public accounts committee, I think it is important to clarify a couple of things. The policy direction to proceed with Ornge was actually given, it would appear, in the early winter of 2003. Some of you will recall that at that point, Tony Clement was the Minister of Health on behalf of the Eves government. The job of negotiating the performance agreement was given to Fasken's, and one of the principals at Fasken's was Lynne Golding, Mr. Clement's wife.

Mr. Clement has never appeared before the committee, but his wife, as a principal at Fasken's, has. She absolutely did say that it was a wonderful performance agreement. Of course she said that, Speaker; she negotiated it.

Interjection.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Well, the people did at her direction, and when you look at the record of the billing, she was in on a lot of the conversations. But she defended her firm most vigorously at the hearings.

What this legislation actually does do is some things that are not currently in legislation around Ornge. It gives the government the ability to appoint somebody to the board. That was previously lacking, which meant that this board was sort of freelancing out there, creating all

these weird spinoff for-profit companies, and there was no communication back to the Ministry of Health until it was pretty much a fait accompli. With this legislation, the province could have a board member sitting on the board and actually have an understanding of what was going on while it goes on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the members from Simcoe-North, Scarborough Southwest, Toronto-Danforth and Guelph.

The member from Simcoe-North asked why it's taken so long, as this was the second bill proposed, yet it comes—well, close to 10 months certainly until it appears again in front of us as members of this House. I would submit and I would argue that the government side was waiting to see the outcome of the two by-elections in order to potentially bury this thing forever. Who knows what would have happened to this legislation had a majority government been delivered to this government? It could have gone the way of the dodo bird. Thankfully—and that's one of the things I think the folks in Kitchener-Waterloo understood quite clearly, that an opposition is not only effective in bringing about clarity where there is none and transparency where there should be, but also is prepared to stand up to a government, unlike some of the backbench members who should have and could have when you saw this thing get built. You should have said, "Man, we are playing with fire here. We are jeopardizing the lives of Ontarians," yet you stayed silent. Your ministers, various ministers—you went through three of them in the time that Ornge was constructed—stayed silent. They gave it the green light, they signed the cheques, and they are culpable in this mess.

We hope that this is one measure—but the member from Guelph said that now, the government can appoint people to the board. That's what we're afraid of. We don't believe you're competent enough to appoint the right people. Who are you going to appoint?

It's time to change the government. I couldn't be any clearer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I've been eagerly looking forward to the opportunity to speak to this legislation, given the passage of the summer and some of the new information that is constantly emerging about what's happening within our air ambulance service, and one service in particular—I think you probably know which one I'm talking about. Speaker, I find it particularly interesting that the members opposite would request from us support of Bill 50 when the bill is simply a last-ditch effort to save the health minister, who members of this House have consistently proven to be vastly incompetent. Members on this side of the House have called for her resignation numerous times, in fact.

If the government were truly interested in gathering support for their burdened health minister, if they were

truly interested in tackling the problems that exist at Ornge, well, they had the option of forming a select committee. They chose not to do so. They could have presented a bill that had real teeth and real protection for whistle-blowers. They naturally chose not to do so. This is the first glaring hole in this legislation that I'd like to address.

1620

Speaker, the Ornge situation was a tragedy. It affected numerous lives, and the ripples of those deaths will be felt for some time. The inability of an Ornge helicopter to reach a young girl in Windsor—an area close to my own, in Chatham—resulted in a tragic loss of life and calls from the family to get to the bottom of what has happened. In order for that to happen, and in the absence of this government forming a select committee, we need to rely on people intimately involved with the inner workings of Ornge.

To the layman, those people are known as whistle-blowers: workers and civilians brave enough to risk exposure because they understand the terrible truths that must be brought to ensure that this does not happen again. These folks need protection in order to reveal what they know. They have called for real, stronger protections. This bill makes only a passing effort to provide those protections.

What it does not do is far more obvious. It does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers, something that I think would be clear to anybody, even with a cursory knowledge of the situation.

The bill also dictates what members of this Legislature the whistle-blower may approach, a suggestion that flies so completely in the face of the entire idea of what a whistle-blower is attempting to do: expose the truth.

The bill does not provide a formal process through the Ombudsman that will ensure proper protection for the individuals who bravely come forward to share what they know.

Speaker, these are three basic features of any strong whistle-blower protection, and all three are missing from this Liberal legislation. Could it be because they're not interested in hearing what the experts inside the Ornge organization have to say? Well, the evidence certainly bears that out. Meanwhile, families wait anxiously to hear the truth about why their loved ones are no longer with them because of the incompetence of this ministry and its complete inability to oversee what's happening right under their noses.

It's baffling to me that the government could have spent precious time and resources crafting a do-nothing bill. Our health care system is facing unprecedented challenges: a logjam within our long-term-care homes, an aging-population challenge that has not been properly addressed by the government, and a fiscal crisis of unprecedented proportions. If there was ever any time for the government to get serious about addressing the problems within our ambulance services, this was it. If there was ever a time when a little accountability would have gone a long way, this would have been the moment.

Yet, still, the obfuscating continues. Dr. Chris Mazza tells our public accounts committee that he met with the Premier numerous times, and the Premier flatly denies it. It's nothing but "he said, she said" from that side of the House, while we on this side are desperately trying to get answers for the affected families and for Ontarians as a whole, so that we can move on from this and turn our attention to the myriad issues that confront our health care system, because make no mistake: This bill does none of that. It's simply a mechanism to appear to be doing something about the Ornge scandal. But that horse can't be put back in the barn; it's long gone. This government is tinkering around the edges while serious questions remain about who in this ministry knew what, and when they knew it.

My colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound mentioned a few months ago that this bill is nothing more than grist for the mill, something to chew up time while this government stalls and attempts to deflect the hard truth it is faced with. This has been scandalous wasting of precious resources at a time we can ill afford significant waste: \$750 million in taxpayer money has been funneled into Ornge, and the result is 26 deaths since 2007, a Ponzi scheme set up by Dr. Mazza and, we now know, ignored by senior members of this government despite numerous warnings. It's a complete lack of accountability—top to bottom.

Bill 50 does nothing to address that. Where is the apology from this government for dropping the ball? Where is the remorse for a mistake that was made under their watch? A promise to do better? It's not here; I can tell you that.

The first thing that should happen is that this health minister resign her post. We know she won't do that, and we know that there is such a lack of accountability on that side of the House that her boss, the Premier, certainly won't ask her to do that. I think that's a scandal in itself, and it's wrong. But frankly, we've come to expect nothing less of this government.

Our party, the Progressive Conservative caucus, will continue to fight for the protections that whistle-blowers require and for someone to be held responsible for what has happened since 2007. Ontarians deserve better than what they've been getting thus far.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, you know yourself—you've heard a lot of this debate—that a lot has centred around, ultimately, the salary that was paid to Dr. Mazza for his performance at Ornge. What's interesting is that at this point within this bill, Ornge may still remain off of the sunshine list.

It's particularly interesting because in 2008, we know that Dr. Mazza was making \$298,000 a year—a lot of cheddar there—but somewhere after 2008, Dr. Mazza's name disappeared from the sunshine list. He certainly didn't stop making over \$100,000 a year. When full disclosure was made—thanks to a lot of investigative journalism by the Toronto Star, where this party got a lot

of its information from—he was making \$1.4 million a year. Nothing in this bill stops that from happening again. We won't be able to know how much those folks at the head of Ornge air ambulance will be making when, in fact, we certainly need to know. We need to know what their compensation rates are. We know to know their bonus structures. Are they outside of the framework of any of these agreements? Where are they getting paid? How much are they getting paid? Are they worth what they're being paid?

It certainly begs this House to ensure that there's a comprehensive review of this legislation, that when it gets to committee, all those important aspects of the bill, like this in terms of being transparent with the salary disclosure, are built into it.

I can tell the government right now, and you should be prepared, that you're not going to get this bill, as presented, through committee. You're going to have to do a lot more work to ensure that there's transparency and accountability built in. Maybe you just want us to provide that, which we are, of course, ready to do. But there are certainly some fundamental aspects that are lacking in this bill that New Democrats are totally prepared to deliver to the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to speak to Bill 50 and perhaps speak about some of the things that are actually in the bill, because nobody else seems to be doing it.

1630

I spoke before to the fact that this bill would give the government the power to have some representation on the board of directors so we've got a direct pipeline into knowing what is going on, and actually just even the viewpoint of having the provincial interest as opposed to the Ornge interest, which unfortunately, we found out, are not necessarily the same.

But another thing that was lacking with the performance agreement the way it was previously written was any authority, once the Ministry of Health understood that the agreement was flawed, to unilaterally step in and demand that the performance agreement be upgraded. This legislation actually gives the ability for the minister to direct that certain provisions be added to the performance agreement. It also gives the minister the authority to give direction to Ornge with respect to operational issues. Finally, it sets up the legislative framework that is required for the minister to have the authority to step in and appoint a supervisor. That ability exists in the Education Act, in the Hospitals Act and in the legislation that sets up community care access centres, but it doesn't exist in the Ambulance Act. So this would provide the minister with the authority to step in and take over the organization in the future if, God forbid, it should ever go off the rails again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to speak to this and to support the good thoughts that my colleague Rick Nicholls, from Chatham-Kent-Essex, provided for us.

This is nothing more than hypocrisy and political opportunism. The Liberals could have called this at any time they wished, but we're nine months later and we're still not here, until today, talking about it. It goes back to the fact that the select committee—we've asked the Premier to speak so we can truly get to the bottom of the truth and ensure that this never ever happens again. Once again his arrogance says, "I do not have to show up and state my claim and stand in front of you," even though in this House they said, "If it's the will of the people, we would do that."

It's a cover for the minister's incompetence. The original performance agreement allowed her to intervene at any time and has all of the powers that she's now coming late to the party asking for. Her comment, "We will do better," is becoming a little bit tiring in here and it's a bit of a sad saga for the Liberal government. Think about eHealth. Think about the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants. Think about the OMA doctor agreements. Think about the teacher negotiations. "We should have thought about that. We'll come back and revisit that. We maybe should have consulted those people first." Well, you know what? This is yet another one of those. They had the ability to write that agreement right in the first place. It's too little; it's too late.

Specifically, with emergency air ambulances you don't always get the second chance when you're dealing with people's lives. Every time those workers go out they need that they have that support of their superiors, that they have the ministry behind them, who are prepared to listen and fully support them. The whistle-blower needs to be free to expose the truth and to be protected, and their interest is always—those front-line workers only care about patient care. They don't care about government; they don't care about politics; they don't care about spin. They're there for one reason: When they step forward, you know darn well they're doing it because of the conviction they have in their careers.

I ask you: Why has the Liberal government taken so long to call this bill? They control the agenda. The Liberals control the agenda, not us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, speaking to Bill 50 and the initial comments from the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, the one thing that's interesting about this one is that, most times, you hear, "It's the last government that did this. It was Mike Harris." But who wrote the original accountability agreement? It was the Liberals. The member from Guelph would like to talk about the things that are in the bill, but we would like to talk about the things that aren't in the bill. Because if you're actually going to clean this up—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Send it to the committees. We'll work on it.

Mr. John Vanthof: You know what? We could have sent it to committee a lot sooner if the government had

called it, but they didn't call it. One thing they haven't done—a couple of things. Freedom of information is a really important part of this whole package, but is that in Bill 50? No. So if you were really going to—and my honourable colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton said that one of the important things is, you want to create stuff to fix it for the next time. So if you're going to fix it for the next time—freedom of information. Wouldn't that be a good thing to put in?

Another thing that I've just learned since I got here, this novel thing, how you can call ministries to government agencies and actually review them. If you were going to fix something, especially with all the experience since you wrote the original agreement—and there are really some big flaws in the original agreement. Since you wrote it, you would say, "You know what? It would be a good idea if this time they could bring it to government agencies. We could catch it earlier this time." But guess what? It's not in there.

So if the intent from the government is really to fix the problem, you would put in double-check and triple-check; you would actually make it want to work. Hopefully, when it gets to committee, we can change it to actually make it so it protects the people, because at the end of the day you wrote it, and I guess we'll have to help you to rewrite it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I would again like to thank my colleague from Essex. I would also like to thank my colleague from the government side and Guelph, as well as my PC caucus colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and, of course, the member of the third party opposition from Timiskaming-Cochrane. I want to thank you very much for your comments. Your input is invaluable.

What we find is that the government has been stalling on this particular bill. Would this have really been necessary had the government followed through on a statement made by the Minister of Health that said, "I am prepared to do the will of this Legislature"? The will of this Legislature was to in fact create a select committee that would give us wider and deeper ability to get to the bottom of this. Those were her words; those were her comments. However, this government has stalled on every occasion. They've road-blocked us every bit along the way.

Whistle-blowers need protection, and this bill is not providing the protection that whistle-blowers need. As a result of that, this particular whole issue on Ornge has in fact had to go to the public accounts committee for hearings, where we have heard good testimony from individuals. But we need more, because we're not getting to the bottom of this the way we need to get to the bottom of this thing.

They have wasted countless dollars, taxpayer dollars, throughout this entire process, and they've taken up a lot of valuable time. To get to the bottom of it, you have to ask the question: Why? You have to ask them why

they're doing it. They know. They know full well why they're doing it.

I've heard from front-line people in London taking taxis to Windsor to take care of situations where air ambulance was not available.

As a result of that, I want to thank the members for their comments and conclude my statement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to stand up and contribute to the debate on Bill 50, Ambulance Amendment Act.

What we're really discussing here is accountability and oversight. While this takes some steps to prevent what happened at Ornge from happening again, it does not get to the root of the problem, which is really government-wide. We can claim that this is a problem with an organization that has gone wrong, we can try to grandstand and make a whole lot of noise to get our names in the headlines, or we can acknowledge that something is seriously wrong with accountability and oversight, not only at Ornge but across government.

The simple fact is, governments and opposition members have a duty to be stewards of the public purse. This money that is spoken about so easily at times is not our money; it's taxpayers' money. If we are to make investments in any program, they need to be made with the realization that there has to be a greater level of accountability and transparency. The government is not a private investor hoping to make a strategic investment that will result in more wealth. The government is the people of this province, and each dollar spent by this government is money from not only from the wealthy, but also the working poor. And that's something we have to remember, the families and the hard-working individuals that pay taxes, whether on income or goods and services, and we have a responsibility to them to be open and honest about every single cent that is spent.

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But too often we forget that. Too often we forget that government can irresponsibly throw money around in an effort to make it look like it's doing something when in reality it's not. Whether it's millions of dollars at Ornge with no public accountability or millions of dollars to a company that hopes to produce Popsicle sticks, we need to demand further transparency and accountability. Too often we hear of companies that have received government money or promises that fail, not because the product was bad but because, outside of announcing the money, the government has failed to ensure a return on investment by making sure that other steps, such as securing the proper wood supply, for example, have been made. We live in a society where everyone is rushing to make an announcement so quickly but fails to properly investigate the business plans to properly ensure there is accountability.

The government can say anything it wants about Ornge. They can say it was one bad apple or it was an organization that went awry. But the fact is that this

government on the opposite side here, the Liberal government, created it; they did. Whether it's through their arrogance, their incompetence or whatever, they rushed to make the announcement and tell the world what a great job they were doing without putting the necessary steps in place to ensure a mess like this didn't happen.

We can listen to the government tell us, "Well, now we've learned our lesson and we're cleaning up the mess." But the fact is, they haven't learned. Not only does this bill not do enough to ensure that taxpayer dollars are protected at Ornge; it doesn't do anything to restore public confidence in the entire government funding model, and that's where things have to change.

Taxpayers should be allowed to know where every single penny has gone, and that does not happen. Organizations, boards, agencies or companies that receive government grants should all be subject to reviews that the government can put in place, whether it's freedom of information, a review by the Ombudsman or being subject to review by a committee. That doesn't mean that each and every \$5,000 grant means a company or individual will be subject to a judicial review. It does mean that if there are questions, though, we should be able to seek answers without jumping through hoops or investigative reports.

Honestly, I don't know what it is with this government. Facts and figures like \$100 million are thrown around like they're nothing. But \$100 million isn't nothing to me. I look at the \$180-million price tag cancelling the Mississauga gas plant and ask myself, "What could be done with that money?" In my region, that's dozens of new schools, hospitals, improvements in health care, an extension of government services where there are gaps. That's a lot of money. In fact, that's the budget of about five or six good-sized municipalities in my area. That's a lot of money, and that should be a criminal act.

The government will sit here and say, "Well, everybody promised it, so we shouldn't be blamed." Well, I will stand here and say that nobody should have promised it; it should not have been done. This government is closing travel information centres that provide a vital service to an essential industry. That may, if they're lucky, save \$250,000 annually. But it's perfectly okay to waste \$180 million because of some NIMBY protesters. It just does not make sense. It's not right; it's not fiscally responsible. Just for the record, that power plant closure comes at what the travel information centres would actually cost—they would have burned through \$180 million in about 360 years. That's what's really, really shameful.

Of course, at the same time, we've got the Minister of Education, one of the MPPs who benefited from the deal, parading across the province saying we have to tighten our belts and fabricating a war on teachers. All this talk about accountability and belt-tightening and being a strong guardian of the public purse just doesn't fly, not because of the power plant, but because for eight years this was the government that negotiated those deals they're now desperate to get out of.

They can't blame the past government, as was mentioned. They are the past government. So I think it's fair to say, on behalf of taxpayers, what were you thinking? If this deal was so bad, why did you sign it? It's the government's responsibility to think about future impacts to ensure that decisions made today don't have negative impacts tomorrow. So what exactly were they doing here? And it brings us back to Ornge.

The simple fact is, it could be that Ornge hid the money and maybe they weren't upfront. That's giving this government the benefit of the doubt. But the problem is, the structure was allowed to be created this way. That's the problem. The fact that they can now look back and say "oopsie" doesn't quite cut it—it's not good enough—because this bill only takes steps to fix Ornge, and even that doesn't go far enough.

If we were serious, we'd bring in real, meaningful legislation that ensured accountability for all funds provided by the government to all organizations, agencies, corporations and whoever else asks for money. It's not a violation of their privacy if they agree to it. I think that we need to say once and for all that if you want help, then you need to open up your books; we need access to your books to know where the money is going.

I honestly think that we can do better. I honestly believe that we're in this financial mess not because there isn't enough money, because there is—we remember the HST; that's a huge influx of cash—but it's about the decisions that this government makes, and throwing money at a problem and hoping that it goes away isn't an acceptable answer anymore. It should never have been an acceptable answer.

This bill does provide some help to ensure future accountability at Ornge, and although it falls very short of what it should provide and does nothing to address the other departments and agencies of government, I will be supporting it. It's my hope that more sweeping legislation is coming because I do realize that efforts like this do take some time. The government has had plenty of time, but I will be supporting this legislation, as I said. At best, it is a half measure, but at least it increases some level of accountability, and that's something that my constituents and people across all of Ontario deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments made, once again, by the member from Kenora-Rainy River. Again, what's in front of us is Bill 50.

I just stepped out for a minute, trying to get a count of how many hours this bill has been debated. It's been debated nine hours—nine hours of debate. On top of that, members of the opposition rang the bells on this bill.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Oh, I remember that.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes. One member was from Haldimand-Norfolk, and the other one from Cambridge. They rang the bells. Once, on April 30, one hour was spent on bells—that was the member from Haldimand-Norfolk—and another 30 minutes by the member from Cambridge. So if the members of the Conservative Party—

Mr. Jeff Leal: There were so many bells, I thought it was Christmas.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes, it felt like Christmas bells.

If members from the opposition want to criticize this government, they should first try to explain to us why they rang those bells. There's no explanation. Nine hours were wasted. Meanwhile, people are now saying, "Why did the government not call this bill?" The government called this bill. If there's any white elephant in this room, the white elephant is the Conservative Party wasting all their time ringing bells instead of trying to work.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's the symbol of the Republican Party in the States—the elephant.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes, yes. It's probably why they use that. It's a good idea. I never thought of that before.

Anyway, getting back to the comments made by the member from Kenora-Rainy River, the member from Kenora-Rainy River is criticizing this bill—actually, criticizing the whole air ambulance issue. This bill addresses those issues. Let's get it into committee. Let's get it into committee and let's work on the amendments that would come up in committee instead of wasting time here grandstanding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As mentioned recently, why did the member from Haldimand-Norfolk ring the bells? The reason being that we need a select committee; I think we need a full-blown inquiry on this. And as far as this particular legislation, I listened to the comments from the member from Kenora-Rainy River. We have legislation. It's Bill 2; it was introduced last November. It's virtually obsolete now, given the information that we have received in the public accounts committee. I sit on that committee. In 16 days of hearings, we've heard from over 50 witnesses. So much of what we heard during those committee deliberations is not reflected in legislation that was crafted last November—legislation that has yet to be passed, legislation that really has gone over its shelf life.

1650

But you know, Speaker, there is more work to be done. There's one piece of the puzzle that remains. There's one elected representative in this House who has defied the committee, who has not come forward to explain from the Premier's perspective what is going on. We need that kind of information. Obviously, we need that information to ensure that Bill 50 is amended. Even though it's not up to snuff, at least all of us have a crack at coming up with some half-decent legislation. We need that legislation. Both Premier Dalton McGuinty and his senior health policy adviser, Sophia Ikura, refused to appear before the committee. We have to find out what they are holding back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, what I want to address—again, I touched on this earlier; I want to just flesh out my argument or my idea a bit further.

The bill presents an amended performance agreement which stipulates further requirements and benchmarks that the transfer payment organization has to meet. But what it doesn't do, and what I would like to see a bill do—and this would restore some confidence in the government, restore some confidence in our ability to oversee transfer payment organizations—is: What will the government do on a systemic basis when they receive a freedom-of-information request from the opposition party? What will they do when they receive a question about salaries of a transfer payment organization? What will the government do when they receive information that there are improper activities going on at a particular organization? What will the government do in those particular circumstances, if we had some assurances that a request made by the opposition party would result in an answer, if a freedom-of-information request regarding salaries would be met with an answer?

If the government took those requests and those inquiries seriously and legislated a systemic approach, that, if we receive any concerns about a transfer payment organization, we will investigate them seriously; if we receive any complaint about the manner in which the services are provided or the quality of the services and we will address them immediately, that would be a more meaningful approach, because it wouldn't just be solving Ornge; it would be a systemic solution to any type of scandal that could occur regarding any transfer payment agency.

That's the type of legislation that would really instill some confidence in myself, and I'm sure that would instill some confidence in the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Bill 50 was the subject of a lot of questions to the senior lawyer from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care when she came before our committee. I think if members had sat there with all those 55, 60 witnesses, they would have seen that we had a very thorough going-through of this whole thing.

The senior lawyer sat there and answered the questions and said that Bill 50 will satisfy the concerns that we had. She answered those questions very specifically, and she is a senior lawyer with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. She was the one who prepared this bill. She was chosen because she had not had any dealings with Ornge before, and she went through and answered the questions. We should get Hansard around to everyone so they can see that Bill 50 is the bill we need. It's a bill that the minister has been calling for for some time now.

We know that the Conservatives, when they were trying to set this up in 2000, were looking at a private-enterprise system for partly this system. We know that it was Minister Clement's wife was the lawyer for this for

seven or eight or nine years, that \$9 million was billed to Ornge by her firm.

This was a situation that got out of control, where the professionals were not looking after—and there were some greedy people within the organization who took actions that really were against the best interests of all the taxpayers of Ontario and all the people who use that service. This happened.

We have the OPP doing their investigation. We have the Auditor General looking at this. We had all those witnesses come before us. We know what this is. Let's get down to business. Let's approve Bill 50 and get on with making Ornge the best system we can to assist the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I return to the member for Kenora—Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'd like to thank the members from Scarborough Southwest, Haldimand—Norfolk, Bramalea—Gore—Malton and Ottawa—Orléans for contributing to the discussion here.

I wanted to hone in on some of the comments made by the member from Scarborough Southwest, who said this bill does address the problems that we have with Ornge. I just can't agree with that. There is no way that this bill—what there is to the bill, all, what is it, a page and a half? I'm not even sure how long it is. Okay, it might be about eight pages. There's no way this addresses the systemic problems that I've outlined here today.

A couple of things I didn't mention: It won't do anything to help the private companies that have been forced out of business and out of this province because of this duplicitous venture. It won't do anything to fill the gap caused by the loss of these businesses.

Something that we've been hearing about time and time again, more often now than ever, is the number of Ornge helicopters and planes that are grounded. Ordinarily, what would happen if there is a mechanical problem or a staffing shortage or whatever problem there might be—we would have some alternatives; we would have some other companies that would be able to step in, like a company that operated in Fort Frances, in my own riding. But this has been structured in a way that is not competitive, in a way that has a gross disregard and disrespect for taxpayers' money. Something I remember hearing from the company before they did go out of business is that they operated in Fort Frances and they would not get a call in Fort Frances because an Ornge plane or helicopter would get called from Sudbury to go and pick up some patients in their area. It's disgusting. We've lost those good-paying jobs in our community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I wish I could say that I'm happy to talk about Bill 50, but to be honest, Mr. Speaker, it's disheartening, this whole travesty surrounding the Ornge scandal. When you look at how they've handled Ornge and the scandal with Dr. Mazza and the whole intricate scheme that this health minister allowed to

occur, there's a lack of accountability, a lack of responsibility and a lack of leadership, which has become the hallmark of this Liberal government which is out of gas and out of ideas.

Here's the thing: The health minister has the power, the insight, the influence to have addressed this issue long before the unfortunate deaths of 26 individuals here in the province of Ontario.

This government has yet again presented to us and the people of Ontario the contempt that they have, the arrogance that they have when actually looking at the issue, how it got to be such a huge scandal, how Dr. Mazza went from making \$280,000 a year to over \$1.4 million a year. When I heard that figure, Mr. Speaker, I thought perhaps he was on the third line of defence for the Toronto Maple Leafs. Probably, the result was the same: You pay a huge amount of money, but the result is still a failed attempt to do something.

1700

I heard earlier today, during debate on this bill, the member from Scarborough Southwest allude to the ringing of the bells before we broke for the Christmas break. He asked why we were ringing the bells here in opposition. I want to make it very clear as to why we were ringing the bells. The member knows exactly why we were ringing. The reason why is because the Minister of Health said that she would, if it was the will of this House, support the creation of a select committee to get down to the bottom of the scandal at Ornge. The NDP will recall as well. We voted for that resolution. It passed. The will of the House was set. A select committee should have been formed, if the Minister of Health had done the honourable thing.

Let's be clear to the people of Ontario: When you spin the optics of "the OPP are investigating the scandal at Ornge," the parameters or the mandate of that OPP investigation are very constrictive, to say the least. It's restrictive also in the sense that they are not allowed to do a full investigation. This is why we were ringing the bells: to put pressure on the government to do the honourable thing, to create the select committee so that we could get down to the bottom of this scandal. This didn't happen. Unfortunately, this is one of the tactics we have at our disposal in opposition to bring pressure on the government to do the right thing, to do the thing that they should have done in the first place. People's lives were at stake.

Here we have, again, the arrogance of the Premier, who we have asked to come before the committee to talk and address the issues that we have, answer the questions that we have. What is the Premier hiding from, Mr. Speaker? Who is he protecting? Himself? Alfred Apps? We're not sure. But one thing is clear to me: The Premier, again, is doing a great disservice for what democracy is, and that's making sure that each and every one of us here, as elected representatives of our constituents and for the province of Ontario, does the honourable thing.

One of the problems we have with Bill 50 is the fact that there's nothing substantive in this piece of legis-

lation. And one of the things I find particularly upsetting, disturbing, is the fact that it doesn't have anything to protect whistle-blowers.

I can speak to this personally. I have had correspondence and discussions with a paramedic who, even today, is being harassed because of the concerns that he brought forward into a death in my riding. I contacted the chief coroner and the chief coroner brought this forward to the investigators, who are now harassing this paramedic. They're essentially bullying this gentleman around for doing the right thing, the honourable thing, and that's sticking up and looking out for the best interests of each and every individual who has used the air ambulance and land ambulance services. In fact, this lack of insight by this government and the lack of supervision by this minister—I'll give you an example of the type of lack of oversight.

According to this gentleman now currently being harassed, in Peterborough, the land ambulance building was deemed to be unfit, unsuitable. They got rid of the building and had to build a new facility for \$9.6 million for the land ambulance service. What did they do with the old building that was deemed basically condemned?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Jeff Leal bought it.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: No, the member from Peterborough did not buy it. However, the Ornge air ambulance service moved in to do some refurbishments. Here we go with, again, money being wasted in Ornge, but more importantly, lives put in perilous situations that may have been prevented if this minister had the proper oversight of Ornge. How can you put a price tag on somebody's life?

This goes beyond any upsetting situation brought before this chamber since I've been in session. It pales when you take into consideration the lives that have been put at stake versus eHealth and the \$2-billion boondoggle that this minister has allowed under her watch.

Mr. Speaker, this minister has to do the honourable thing, and I ask for her to resign.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to speak after the member from Northumberland-Quinte West. I agree; it's not a pleasure to be talking on this issue.

I'd like to spend a minute to talk about a tale of two Ontarians, one a person who was formerly from my riding, Trevor Kidd, a paramedic who worked at Ornge, who saw problems, who tried to fix it and who lost his job, who gave up his job to make the system better. He blew the whistle and he was ignored. He continued to warn people; he was ignored. He came to my predecessor's office, the former member for Timiskaming-Cochrane, and you know what? Nothing happened. He appeared in front of the committee. I can distinctly recall when he was sitting in the members' gallery and everybody had to mention Trevor Kidd's name, all the good things that he had brought to light in this scandal. I'd like to commend Trevor Kidd.

But there's another Ontarian who refused to appear before that committee, who could have shed so much

light on this and who could have made Ontario so much better, especially in his position of power and, hopefully, respect. He could have; he should have. It would have made us all feel a lot better. I hate to compare this man to a true Ontarian like Trevor Kidd, someone I wish—I hope—that at some point the Premier steps up and becomes the Premier and steps into that committee.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to stand up in the House today to speak about Bill 50. First of all, let me congratulate the Minister of Health for redressing Ornge. When she heard about this anomaly, to say the least, at Ornge, she stepped in and asked for a review of Ornge. She changed the management and appointed one of our best deputy ministers, Mr. McKelvie, to manage Ornge.

I want to pay tribute also to those who came forward to say what was happening in Ornge. As a health care professional, it's so important to make sure that when an accident occurs or when someone is ill and needs to be transported by air ambulance—usually it's a very serious case, and we need all the good professionals at their best and working in the best condition possible.

The minister appointed a group of very responsible people, very good administrators, and also a new board of directors. The board of directors of Ornge had nothing to be congratulated about, because they were given a very great responsibility and they failed in their responsibility.

I hope that with Bill 50, this will help to redress the situation forever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Congratulations to Northumberland-Quinte West for a great dissertation.

I've been hearing all day about how it's not their fault, that it's the previous government's fault for any problem that occurs in this province. On behalf of my riding, I'd like to say that after nine years, maybe your government can actually take some responsibility in governing this province and start dealing with the issues that you've been ignoring so far.

Bill 50 is nothing but a red herring. Frank Klees, in his opening speech months ago, stated that all the powers are there for you to deal with this issue. It has just been ignored. It has been overlooked by previous health ministers. The buck stops at the top. It's just proof of the further mismanagement of this province. If you go around how this government is failing, we're starting with Ornge—billions of dollars lost because the Minister of Health was absent from her job in following up.

We've got the destruction of the horse race industry because the government decided not to consult before going through and ravaging an industry that brings a billion dollars into our coffers.

We've got jails being closed continually, even though there's huge overcrowding going on throughout this

province, and violence where jail guards are now at risk of being injured or killed on the job.

The most disdainful of this whole thing is the fact that the Premier has been called to talk at this committee, to give his knowledge to the people of Ontario of what's going on, and he refuses. It's pure disdain for the people of Ontario. He has knowledge that could help us come to the bottom of this problem. He's protecting his health minister. She should be fired. The Premier, by avoiding going to this committee, is dishonouring this province and he should resign.

This is all in the fact that we could have had the select committee on Ornge that this House motioned and the government ignored. Last week we motioned Lisa MacLeod's bill to have the Auditor General review horse racing. Let's hope they don't ignore this also.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm always pleased to rise to speak to this important issue here today. I think what we're missing is the originality of the direction that the government had taken. Its primary focus was on the privatization of the ambulance service. I understand that prior to Ornge ambulance, the service had been delivered in a mixed model as well, using private service providers, and it didn't necessarily function too well. But ultimately, our health care system is predicated on the principles of universality and also the fact that you should not benefit financially from others in your country or your province who are sick. You should never benefit from the illness or sickness of your neighbours, of your community, of members of your community. Here we have Mr. Mazza, who benefited quite handsomely—ransomably—from this system. It was designed for him to be able to do that without oversight, without accountability.

They're having a discussion in the United States right now about their health care system. They're talking about a whole host of issues: private, public models, pre-existing conditions. The fact that this guy was given the ability to spend \$250 million on our system is as banal as standing up and delivering a speech to an empty chair. It doesn't make sense. It should never happen. It's a mistake. The only pre-existing condition is ineptitude, Mr. Speaker.

I submit again that there was no one watching the henhouse, as it were, and here we are today to try to fix some of those problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the number from Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'd like to thank the members from Timiskaming-Cochrane, Ottawa-Vanier, Elgin-Middlesex-London and Essex for their comments on Bill 50. This is obviously, Mr. Speaker, something we need to take seriously, and I think we have shown on this side, both our NDP colleagues and ourselves, that we do take this seriously. In fact, this Minister of Health has failed the people of the province. Bill 50 is nothing more than a band-aid solution to a broken tibia problem.

It amazes me that this government never takes responsibility for anything, Mr. Speaker. It's remarkable: After nine years almost of being in power, they do not take responsibility for any misdoing that goes on here in the province. If they can't spin it on us and past governments in the province, they try and blame our federal counterparts for the misfortunes of the province of Ontario and what we're seeing now.

The Premier needs to show some semblance of leadership and appear before the committee. He also needs to clear the air on what he's hiding from. What could be so damning that the Premier refuses to do the honourable thing, Mr. Speaker, and appear before the committee and clear the air so we have a better understanding, more information as to what actually went on? Is he protecting the Minister of Health's incompetence on her file, Mr. Speaker? I would argue, that's precisely it. But it goes even deeper than that. That's why we were calling for a select committee. This minister needs to resign.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, this afternoon we're are going through Bill 50, the Ambulance Amendment Act (Air Ambulances), 2012. This bill allows cabinet to appoint representatives to the board of designated air ambulance service providers and appoint a supervisor or special investigator, as can be done with a hospital. It allows the minister to issue directives to air ambulance providers. It allows for the amendment of the accountability agreement at any point without consultation with the service provider. Bill 50 will provide whistle-blower protection to air ambulance providers. None of those things are negative, Speaker. They may potentially be helpful.

However, Speaker, there are omissions from the bill that are of consequence. Ornge in particular will still not be subject to freedom of information, nor will Ontario's Ombudsman have oversight of the agency.

1720

As I was saying earlier, this province has just gone through a very scarring experience. We've seen an agency of this province used for personal gain. We've seen extraordinary salaries paid out, salaries that were covered by a web of bureaucratic screening—a web that prevented the public from knowing, under the sunshine list, what people were actually being paid.

If this bill was going to ensure a repetition of this kind of problem—if it was going to make sure that the public was able to ferret out these kinds of problems, make sure that they did not fester in the dark, then this bill should have included a requirement that freedom of information and the Ombudsman have jurisdiction over this operation. That's missing.

Ornge will continue to be an organization that can't be called to government agencies. The ability of the public and opposition parties to hold the government to account is, unfortunately, limited. One of those tools that we have is to call an agency to a committee of the Legislature, question them, probe, find out precisely what has been

happening and, frankly, follow up on questions that have been raised with us in the course of our day-to-day contact with the wider world. This bill doesn't provide for that kind of openness, doesn't provide for that opportunity for accountability.

This government has had an accountability agreement with Ornge, and as my colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton or my colleague from Nickel Belt can attest, the government has not even used the instruments that it had at hand to ensure that there was accountability and operation by this agency in the best interests of the province as a whole.

Without the proper structure and without the proper instruments being put in place for use by public, opposition and stakeholders, the potential exists for us to relive the Ornge mistakes and scandals in another form, but again and again.

The Minister of Health introduced this bill, the one we're dealing with today, on the same day the Auditor General released his damning report on Ornge. We saw that as an attempt to change the channel, but even then, the bill falls short.

The Minister of Health and the Premier would like us to believe that they had no part in creating the disaster that was Ornge. They blame a faulty accountability agreement, yet their oversight fell short of the instruments, the tools, that they had in hand.

I have to repeat: Without making sure that the Ombudsman has jurisdiction, without making sure freedom of information applies, without making sure this agency and others have to be accountable to committees to the Legislature, we will simply see the problems of the last few years reproduced at another time in another agency.

We've been told that Ornge was unaccountable, inaccessible, because it was a federally incorporated entity, and somehow this prohibited the government from exercising the necessary oversight, in spite of the fact that many of Ontario's hospitals are federally incorporated, and that has not changed the ability of governments to, in fact, oversee their operations. Whether they have used that power, whether they've used it intelligently in the public interest, is a matter for another debate. But it has not stopped them, when they felt the need to act, from acting.

The officials of Ornge have been blamed by the government, and, I would say, rightly so. We share in saying that there was much wrongdoing at Ornge, much that should have been addressed by those who were in a position to act and protect the public interest. However, in committee hearings, Ornge officials have told legislators that the government was briefed at every step of the way. Government blames the bureaucracy in spite of the fact it is clear that MPPs were shielding themselves from information, and it's clear that elected representatives were aware of what was going on and should have acted.

At times the government has even tried to blame this whole scandal on the opposition, implying that we could have done more, this in spite of the fact that we asked dozens of questions at estimates about Ornge in 2010 and

that these were never answered. I have to tell you, Speaker, as someone who goes to the estimates committee, who tries to get answers and who tries to find out exactly what is being done with public funds, I can well imagine that very critical questions were asked about Ornge, questions that revealed fundamental problems, and that they were simply brushed aside. That is a substantial problem for Ontario and for this government.

This party filed freedom-of-information requests. Those were denied, and the information, such as Chris Mazza's salary, was hidden from us and, thus, from all of Ontario. The NDP was stonewalled by this government, and yet the government has the audacity to turn around and blame the opposition and the NDP for not having probed far enough. We've been told that alarm bells were raised in January 2011, and then we were told that no, in fact, they weren't. We were told that the board had been fired at Ornge, and then we were told that the government didn't have the power to fire and that people resigned voluntarily.

It's clear from the hearings that happened to date and would be clearer if committee, as this Legislature requested, had been set up to probe more deeply, that the stories that the government has put forward have been unravelling, and that we've seen more than incompetence or mismanagement at Ornge. We see an organization that was fleecing the Ontario public, an organization that built a complex web of corporate schemes to benefit a few at the top of the organization. But we also see a government that was not willing to pick up on the points that were made in committee by the opposition, by the NDP, when it should have done that much earlier on.

This bill should go to committee, and this bill should be strengthened substantially.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Toronto—Danforth. They're thoughtful comments, and they talk about the issue of the air ambulance issue in front of us for several months now.

One thing I wanted to say about his comments: Unlike the member from Northumberland—Quinte West, he mentioned a number of things about why he didn't like Bill 50, saying that the bill doesn't provide whistle-blower protection. There's lots of things in Bill 50 that are worth reading, including the whistle-blower protection that's clearly in this bill and—

Mr. Jeff Leal: What section?

1730

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: The section is 7.7, subsection (1).

Mr. Jeff Leal: Section 7.7; okay, good.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It says right here, "Whistle-blowing protection"; it's in plain writing. I wish the member from Northumberland—Quinte West had addressed that.

But the member from Toronto—Danforth is addressing parts of the bill. I understand his concern that it may not

go far enough, but my argument is, let it go to committee. We've been debating this for over nine hours. Unlike the third party, the official opposition has rung the bells twice, on April 30 and on May 3, regarding this bill; they're unsatisfied with this bill and continue to obfuscate what the problem is with this bill.

I think there's no harm. The public accounts committee can still meet and call witnesses. I think the important thing is that this bill, Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, go to committee. That's where the hard work is done. That's where we can get the public to be invited, questions to be asked and also amendments to be made. Then you can find out where the government stands on some of these amendments and—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Leave no stone unturned.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes, leave no stone unturned, but at least debate this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm happy to speak to Bill 50. I can tell you, it's one of the things I hear most about when in the riding of Kitchener—Conestoga. I will say it's in heavy competition with the power plant that was moved from Mississauga, but that's a discussion for another day. It equally gets as much attention.

I will just comment quickly. The member previous did mention the fact that there was some—"obfuscate" was the word he used. I definitely agree with some of my colleagues that had spoken earlier. The Premier is the one who is clearly obfuscating this House in terms of not attending the committee—to have him be a witness at committee. It's unfortunate that he does, in fact, have something in common with Dr. Chris Mazza, and that's the fact of him not wanting to come to committee and clear the air, literally, on this mess.

We've highlighted today some of the issues that we have with Bill 50. Obviously we truly do believe this is a way for the minister to provide cover in the failure of oversight and leadership on the file over at Ornge. We do have some specific concerns with the whistle-blower protection section within the bill, as mentioned earlier. Trevor Kidd was one of the whistle-blowers. We must commend him for taking his role in being active on bringing this to attention.

Obviously, the bill does not provide across-the-board protection for whistle-blowers. Again, back to the minister: They did have the power to intervene at Ornge under the original Ornge performance agreement, as well as the Independent Health Facilities Act.

I only have about 10 seconds left. It is a shame what happened at Ornge. It continues to be a concern of a lot of my constituents, and I definitely don't think that Bill 50 does anything to really address the true concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My seatmate, the member for Toronto—Danforth, listed a number of positive points to this bill, and I agree with him on those. He also listed a

number of things that are missing, and I agree with those as well.

In addition, one of the most troubling things about the bill and one of the most troubling things about the previous performance agreement was not what was in the performance agreement but the fact that the government didn't make use of the tools that were available. My seatmate spoke about this, but let's make it very clear: There were a number of clauses contained in the previous performance agreement, there were a number of tools that were included in this agreement, and we heard extensive testimony about the strength of that performance agreement and the tools that were simply overlooked and absolutely not used whatsoever. The oversight requirements that existed weren't implemented, weren't used.

So what confidence do we have, how do we know that with this amended performance agreement that the government won't just overlook again and won't implement those tools, won't utilize these oversight mechanisms? How do we know that the exact same thing that happened previously won't occur again? If, before, there were certain tools that were available to the government and the government didn't make use of them, and now we give the government some more tools—we give more oversight mechanisms, more clauses, more legislation—if the government chooses not to act on that at this time, we'll be in the same position as we were previously. That's why it's so concerning that the government is entrusted with precious resources—that they actually conduct oversight in a meaningful manner, and if we do pass this bill and I support it, how can we guarantee that mechanisms in place will actually be used and implemented?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I want to again discuss Bill 50. This was legislation prepared by a senior person from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, a senior lawyer who has been with the ministry and had nothing to do with Ornge. She spent a considerable time at the committee answering questions from committee members. Certainly, my recollection of that—and I'd like to have Hansard in front of me but I don't have it—is that this is the agreement that's needed. It's been well-prepared. It's going to give the government the proper oversight. You can look through it. It's got whistle-blower legislation. It's got everything. This has been well done in order to satisfy people in this Legislature and satisfy the people of the committee. There were about nine people on the committee, chaired by the able member from Parry Sound—Muskoka. That evidence was given.

So read Hansard and see that it's the right thing. This has been prepared by the senior solicitor at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. They have a few agreements around with health givers across the province. That issue should not be on the table. That issue should be settled by just reading the Hansard of what happened in committee.

The new performance agreement is there as well. The minister took all the right steps, starting with changing the board and bringing in the OPP.

I find we're a select group on that committee. You talk about a select committee, but I think we're a select group on the public accounts committee. There are enough of us there. We've heard from 60 witnesses. Information has come out. We had a witness who said that his objective was to bring down Ornge. Well, we have to look at all that information that came in.

I'm very pleased with Bill 50. I think it should go ahead as fast as we can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments, and I return to the member for Toronto—Danforth for his reply.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Scarborough Southwest, Kitchener—Conestoga, Bramalea—Gore—Malton and Ottawa—Orléans. My colleague from Bramalea—Gore—Malton has been very close to this issue. He sat on committee, questioned witnesses and has seen the larger dynamic at play.

Two critical pieces that we all need to understand, that even the limited tools that were available to the government prior to this all blowing up were not fully utilized: In 2010, Howard Hampton in estimates asked about the fact that Chris Mazza's salary had disappeared from the radar. At 280,000 bucks, he should still have been publicly disclosed as receiving more than \$100,000 a year. Nothing followed from that, and in the intervening time his salary ballooned to \$1.4 million per year. Even at that time, in 2010, Mr. Hampton's question hit the nail on the head. Something is being obscured and covered up here—part 1.

Part 2: I have to emphasize again that this bill, without providing for freedom-of-information access, for Ombudsman jurisdiction, for referring this agency to committee so that legislators can ask questions and do the job of securing accountability—this bill, in the long run, will fail. Whatever good there is in this bill, it would be buried because it lacks critical tools and locks out the public and legislators elected by the public to hold government accountable. That's the weakness here.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I feel sad that I have to stand and talk about Bill 50—probably more aptly put, the red herring bill—

Mr. Michael Harris: The Ornge herring.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Yes, the Ornge herring may be a better way of putting it—as it tries to hide the real issues here. It's interesting with this government as they try to cover up things.

As one of my colleagues was saying, it's 73 years ago today that Canada declared war on another tyrant, and that's what we're seeing here. The people of Nazi Germany didn't know what was going on, and over my time here I find it hard to believe how hard it is to find

out what's going on and how easy it is for the government to hide things.

They've done everything to deceive this Legislature. First, they ignored the warnings of the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: First of all, under section 23 of the standing orders: We've heard the words "cover-up" and a comparison to Nazi Germany, which I find extremely offensive, particularly since members of my family served in the Canadian armed forces in the Second World War to defend Canada and the Commonwealth and others—the Allied army against the Nazi tyranny. Those kinds of comparisons are very insulting and, I would say, inappropriate language in this Parliament.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I know the member has heard the comments from the member for Peterborough. It's important that the Speaker act to ensure that order takes place during the course of debate, so I would ask the member to consider those thoughts as he continues with his debate on Bill 50.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I hope they take it in the perspective it's intended in.

I look at some of the history behind this, and I look at the leader of the third party, who stood here in December 2010 and brought this issue to light. Of course, it was discarded. Then our member from Newmarket–Aurora, in April 2011, brought it up again. Of course, the comments that were made were, "It's well in hand. We know what's going on. It's not an issue." Of course, with the impending election, there was no way, I believe, that this government would want to bring that issue up at that time.

After the election, the Toronto Star brought this up, and all of a sudden it was an issue. I guess we have to thank them for their hard work in bringing this up. But then again, this government promised—to get through the Christmas session, hoping it would die—a select committee if the House decided to put one in place. Of course, we all saw what happened later on with this promise. The House, in March of this year, voted—in fact, a majority voted for the select committee. Then, once again, the government refused to call it; another issue about trying to hide from the people, or trying to not get to the bottom, I guess, of what was going on here.

It's funny: When I was going through Kitchener–Waterloo this last week, I noticed a sign, and I think this indicates just what the people of Ontario might be thinking. I'll quote the sign; it says, "No, Mr. McGuinty, not this time." I think the people of Ontario are waking up to some of the issues that are happening there.

Another point is they tried to send it to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, another issue of not trying to get to the bottom of what was going on here. With this committee, it would be limited in time, limited in the power to make decisions, limited in providing employee protection. In fact, this has already happened;

we've seen an employee let go for testifying. We've seen a legal letter issued to the employees, threatening that they should not testify or they could be fired or legal action could be brought against them.

So we stood up for the people of Ontario, and we tried to force this government to actually put the select committee in. I've heard them referring to this as the ringing of the bells. But how quickly their memory seems to lapse, because really, that was all about putting in the select committee, something that they promised to do—promised this House and then would not follow through on.

The more resistance went on with this, you really wondered, what are they trying to hide? Why the resistance to getting to the bottom of it? They talk about Bill 50, something that would give them the ability to get to the bottom of it, but they seem to have no wish to. You wonder just what's going on.

I want to quote a member from their party on October 8, 2008, on one of the issues that seemed to be a problem at that time, so this is no secret: "[I]t's time for the ministry to consider additional providers for transport services. My expectation is this organization that has the contract with the ministry to provide the service does so in a timely fashion.

"There is a performance review process within that contract, and perhaps it needs to be reviewed to ensure they're living up to its obligations."

It's the Liberal member from Sault Ste. Marie. Obviously there are some issues on the table here, and you just wonder.

I go on to some of the issues with this committee. I sat in on the second session. I went down and it was interesting. It started somewhere around 8 o'clock that morning and, of course, had to be over by quarter after 10 for question period. They were discussing the use of a lawyer who belonged to the Legislature. This went on for an hour and a half, and it was getting close to adjournment. They had witnesses there waiting to testify. Finally, our member from Newmarket–Aurora stood up and said, "Look, I will put on the table that we ask the lawyer to leave. There seems to be an issue with this. The Liberal Party asked for this lawyer to be present. It seems to be causing a lot of issues. The clerk said that it wasn't out of line, we agreed with it, and now it's creating all kinds of problems." Then I came up to the House for question period just a few minutes later, and the first thing that came up was the House leader stood up, and his comment was, "I don't know what the PC Party is trying to hide. They just tried to fire the lawyer." I just wondered, how smart is this? Who thought of this? So if you were sitting back in front of a TV, the implication was, we were trying to cover something up. Is this how this government runs? Is it a matter of deception or are we really trying to get to the bottom of something?

We can see this bill being put in place. It doesn't give any authority to the government agencies to actually review—which is an easy thing to do. All they have to do is appoint a member in a manner that allows that to

happen. If that had occurred in the first place, we probably wouldn't be standing here with this huge scandal.

I heard implications earlier today about Mike Harris. I was wondering, because I thought it's probably the first issue I have not heard Mike Harris blamed for. I guess that takes it away. Even though this got established well after he was here, there's still that idea that it must be his fault. Is this a government that can't stand up and take credit for anything? There was a time that it was proud of this organization, but unfortunately, it didn't go the full step. It didn't put through the oversight that is required, and now we're dealing with the problems. All they're looking at is either trying to make sure that we don't see those problems or blaming somebody else. I think if we truly want to get to the bottom, we need to do that.

I sat in on some of the testimony, and the executives at Ornge were very clear that this oversight already existed. It was a simple matter of not sending the cheque somewhere. If you want to have somebody listen—and I can't believe that Chris Mazza would be working for this organization if they didn't agree to pay him that \$1.4 million. If the cheque quit flowing, he'd be gone.

Then we have the committee, through its limited responsibilities, trying to get witnesses in, trying to get Mr. Mazza back—can't listen to him. He refuses to appear. They've asked the Premier; he refuses to appear. The Premier's executive assistant refuses to appear. You really wonder now: If we're going to believe that you want to get to the bottom of it, why aren't these people appearing? What's the problem?

It's just a matter of hearing one thing—but as I go back to that sign that I saw last week: "No, Mr. McGuinty, not this time," I think that the people of Ontario are starting to wake up, and third place is probably going to look pretty good for you next time.

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, thank you, Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to speak on Bill 50—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We're going to try and do the questions and comments. I would ask the House to come to order.

Again, I return to the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: —and to comment on the comments from the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. He made some good points—some questionable ones but some good ones. Howard Hampton, in 2010, asked questions on Ornge, and he got stonewalled. Trevor Kidd did his best to bring some of the problems at Ornge to light, and once again, he got stonewalled. He lost his job in trying to do it.

The organization that brought the most light to this issue was the Toronto Star—interesting. It is one of the jobs of the press. We're very proud in this country to

have a free press, and they brought it to light. Then, some would say that the government is trying to stonewall with Bill 50 by clouding the issue, and the governing party across would strongly disagree, but there's one thing that they left out in this bill. Considering that a public organization like the Star, a news organization, actually brought this to light, you'd think that they would have included, and I hope they amend it to include, that the organization will be subject to freedom of information. That's one of the great things: If you have freedom of information and if you have a free press, it adds a layer of scrutiny to all forms of government and all forms of bureaucracy. I strongly urge the government to consider that, because it would make this bill much stronger and hopefully help to prevent such fiascos in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to speak again about Ornge. I'm learning so much about Ornge today. Yes, I'm learning a lot.

What I wanted to say today is that Ornge failed Ontarians. Those who created Ornge in 2002, the minister of the time, Minister Clement, failed the people of Ontario because they didn't put a firm structure in place that will prevent all of this from happening.

The management of Ornge failed Ontarians because they went and took a lot of money from the taxpayers, misused the money of the taxpayers. It's embarrassing. I'm not here to apologize for what they've done. It's so embarrassing, and I hope that it will never happen again.

The board of directors of Ornge failed Ontarians.

So this bill, Bill 50, will go to committee, and I hope that if it's not good enough—make recommendations to improve Bill 50 to make sure this does not happen again.

The opposition was speaking about who was missing before the committee. The Premier answered hundreds of questions in the House. But one person that was missing, that was called and never showed up, was the first Minister of Health who put Ornge together, Minister Clement. His wife did show up before the committee—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The family was represented.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, the family was represented. The wife was there, but Minister Clement never came before the committee.

Perhaps you can use your power to make sure that Minister Clement comes before the committee to answer questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am pleased to say just a few words regarding the excellent comments made by my colleague the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry with respect to Bill 50. I think what we're talking about here is a bill that falls far short of the comprehensive bill that we need in order to make sure that another Ornge fiasco doesn't happen again.

The member commented that this makes it very difficult to obtain information, but it's very easy for them

to be able to hide it. We heard something earlier about obfuscation. The master obfuscators are over on that side when they're trying to blame a previous Progressive Conservative government for the huge fiasco that was Ornge.

In fact, what we have is a situation where we've called the Premier on two occasions to appear before the public accounts committee, and he has failed to show up; a senior adviser from his office who is responsible for the set-up of Ornge also failed to show up. We've had conflicting testimony—serious discrepancies in testimony—between what the Minister of Health has said, when she has been appearing before public accounts, and Dr. Mazza, on the day he appeared.

We have got some serious issues here, and for the Premier to say, as he has of late, that we should be coming forward and making recommendations from the public accounts committee because we've sat for so many hours and heard from so many witnesses—we haven't really even begun to scratch the surface of the mess that is Ornge. Until we really know what the problem is, with the greatest respect, how can we possibly make any recommendations that are going to have any kind of meaning?

We really need to go back to the drawing board on this. We need to continue to have the public accounts committee sit—a select committee would have been preferable, but we've got the committee now; we're working with it. What I would say is that we should be able to come forward with the witnesses that really have the information, starting at the top. We need Premier McGuinty to come and tell us what he knew about Ornge, and then we'll be able to talk about solutions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I wanted to stand up and contribute to the discussion a little bit, especially based on what the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services said. She said that what happened was terrible, that Ornge had misused and wasted taxpayers' money, but she's not here to apologize for them. I think that's part of the problem. Earlier, my caucus colleague said that the public could understand if there were an apology. People will accept if a government is sorry; if this was a mistake, and they were to apologize, people could generally understand that.

It actually speaks to this bill, Bill 50: that, if the government were truly sorry about what had happened, they would have put in stronger and tougher measures to make sure that this doesn't happen again. This is a terrible situation; don't get me wrong. But it also provides us with an opportunity to make things right—not just make things right for Ornge and what has happened with this particular scandal but to make things right, to make sure that this doesn't happen with any department ever again.

We aren't hearing either of those from this government. We're not getting an apology, and we're not getting comprehensive legislation that will make the concrete changes that we need. This is a government that has no remorse, and it makes it very difficult for the public to accept this.

It also makes it very difficult for the public to accept that this wasn't an inside job. If this were truly unacceptable to this government, this government would go above and beyond. They would do this in earnest, and they are not doing that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We still have two minutes to allow the member for Stormont-Dundas—South Glengarry to reply.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: We seem to have a rousing debate over this last issue.

I want to thank the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane, as he brings up some good points. Where's the freedom of information that should be in this bill? Are we truly interested in getting to the bottom of it or are we worried about too much information coming out?

To the Minister of Correctional Services: I hear this Harris issue again. This organization was set up under the McGuinty government. You can't blame the previous government because it wasn't there nine years ago. Actually, I have to commend you for showing some embarrassment for what happened. I think all of us members should be somewhat concerned when an organization can take public money like they did. I almost feel sorry for the Minister of Health, because it wasn't on her watch. I mean, there's no question; she inherited that. But let's get to the bottom of what's happening.

The member from Oshawa, who talked about her efforts to get to the bottom of it—the Premier and the senior advisers refusing to show up—because there's no question that there were many contradictions in the witnesses that we've heard so far. So I think really we have the requirement to go back to the public with the true information.

The member from Kenora—Rainy River: She really has a concern for making sure this doesn't happen again. It's fine to hear a slight apology, but let's get to the bottom. One's got to wonder—and I think I heard it before in this House today—does this not justify a full-blown inquiry? Let's get to the bottom.

The more this government fights not to let information out, it really makes you wonder that maybe we should be going after it and finding out where all these arrows are pointing.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It is 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
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Tuesday 11 September 2012

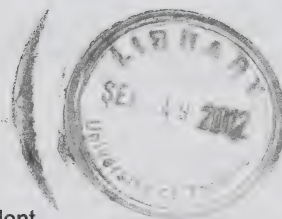
Mardi 11 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 11 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 11 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 6, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / *Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I certainly understand that we're going to be debating the healthy homes renovation tax credit, but I would be remiss if, on the 11th anniversary of 9/11, we didn't acknowledge the amazing, heroic acts of both our American friends as well as many Canadians who were able to help out that day. I just wanted to say that we're thinking of you.

Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit: I'm happy to participate in the discussion. This bill, of course, was introduced on November 23 of last year. Almost 10 months later, we're still discussing this bill. Unfortunately, my concern with it is, it just seems to be another new bill, another additional program that the McGuinty Liberals are trying to tease Ontario voters with. I truly do not see it accomplishing the laudable goals that they make reference to. Part of it is just because the program, in my opinion, seems to be very flawed and very skewed to a very small percentage of people who will actually be able to access that.

Again, this is not a new program. We're seeing this time and time again where the government doesn't seem to understand that you cannot keep adding program after program, new spending after new spending, without actually looking at the other side of the balance and saying, "What do we need to rejig? What do we need to remove in order to look at new programs?"

Subsequently, there are two primary problems that I see with Bill 2. The first, of course, is that it limits scarce taxpayer dollars to help a very, very small number of people, and I'll talk about that. Basically, it's because in order to qualify for the program, you have to spend a large chunk of your income first on the renovation to get a minute tax credit at the end. For the maximum return, a senior, or an individual with a disability, would have to spend \$10,000.

I know in my community the median income for a senior is about \$45,000. I think the average for an Ontario senior is \$45,000. If you look at individuals who have a disability, it is considerably less than that. So to assume that they would have the ability—indeed, the option—of spending up to \$10,000 for renovations to their homes—and we're making a big leap here, because I have questioned how many of them actually own homes when your income is sitting at \$45,000 or, on disability, even less. When you consider that the median income, as I say, is \$45,000 per senior, and for a single senior it's \$25,000, truly, how many of those individuals, of those households, are going to say, "Yes, I'm going to spend a quarter of my annual income, or almost half of my annual income," to get a renovation, and to get a paltry tax receipt, or tax break, at the end?

I ask the minister, through the Speaker: How many? I'd love to have this number. We have questions and answers at the end of our debate. How many seniors and households, individuals with a disability, do you truly anticipate will be able to take advantage of this program? I would argue that it's a very small number. In fact, it's outrageous, when you think about it.

What will happen is that people who need to make those renovations, who were planning to make those renovations, because they have a change in their health circumstances, because their family is able to step up and assist with perhaps a child or a sibling with a disability—they were going to make those renovations anyway. People don't put grab bars in their bathrooms because they want to; they put them in because they need to, because it is a necessity. In many cases, it's post a stroke or a fall, and a health professional has come in, done an assessment of the home and said, "This is what you need to do in order to bring your loved one home. You need to have that ramp. You need to have those grab bars. You need to make the following modifications." They're not waiting for Bill 2 to be passed. They want to bring their loved one home. So they're doing that if they have the ability to do it.

I know in my community, many times, service clubs and the United Way, individual agencies, are helping those residents make those modifications. In fact, Jack MacLaren, my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, was involved in such a program last December, where there was an individual who was essentially a bed-blocker in a hospital up in the Ottawa area, and he could not go home until a ramp was built. To his credit, Jack MacLaren got a group of individuals together—sorry, the MPP from Carleton–Mississippi Mills got a group of individuals together, got the lumber donated from a local business, and they built the ramp. Bless them. I'm pretty sure that they weren't waiting for Bill 2 to be passed before they actually stepped up and got the work done.

0910

It's just unfortunate that we have focused in on something that ultimately is not going to make a difference to seniors and to individuals with disabilities, because we all know there are lots of things that we could be focusing on. I'd love to have a discussion about additional home care, additional supports for people who are dealing with a sibling or a child who has a disability and wants to stay in the community, wants to stay in their home. Bill 2 isn't going to do it. It's not going to cover it off. It's just an example where the McGuinty Liberals think a new program is a solution when in fact a new way of thinking is ultimately what we have to do.

I was listening yesterday during question period, and I must say I was kind of taken aback when the Premier, in responding to a question regarding economic development, economic motivation impetus—what we're doing in Ontario—he talked about Bill 2. We were asking about what he was going to do about the job crisis in the province and he said, "... in order to help us create more jobs. We have a specific bill. It's the healthy homes renovation tax credit, Speaker. It will support \$800 million in home renovation activity on an annual basis and create 10,500 new jobs every year. That's a bill before this House right now."

Really? We're really trying to spin Bill 2 as an economic motivator in the province of Ontario? I can't see it. I just can't see it. It's narrowed down to a small group of residents who were going to be doing that work anyway, because as I said before, we don't put ramps and grab bars in unless we need them, unless there is a reason for it. So to say that Bill 2 is the economic motivator that the McGuinty Liberals are holding their hat on concerns me greatly.

In closing, I wanted to make a quick reference to the Drummond report. In it, it details Ontario's fiscal situation. I know that the members on the other side don't like to talk about the Drummond report, but the reality is, you did ask him to do it. You paid him to do it. He gave you hundreds of recommendations, and what I think you were doing was punting it down the road and saying, "We'll deal with that later. We want to talk about that after the election. We'll let Don Drummond and his committee look at this, review it," and now you've completely ignored it.

In his report, one of the statements he made is that there is \$60 million in Liberal spending programs being introduced, and frankly I don't buy the argument that Bill 2, with its nine or 10 pages, is the answer to Ontario's job crisis. I can't see it. I can't see how you are justifying it as an economic bill. I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Dufferin–Caledon. Certainly she made some obvious points. Ours have been made. That is to say that this is going to affect very few seniors, and we've called on our friends across the aisle to actually come forward, once this plan is implemented, with how much money is actually spent, how much take-up there is, because our suspicion is that there will be very, very little.

Very few seniors can afford \$10,000. Very few seniors can even afford a few hundred dollars right now. Most of the seniors I know, who are struggling to stay in their homes, are doing so because of high energy costs and because they don't have human help, human home care, people to come and do simple things like shopping or bathing or mowing the lawn. Those are the things that seniors need.

Remember that a vast majority of our seniors are struggling, and that in fact one in 10 senior women just about are living in poverty right now—one in 20 men. This is a terrible legacy for those who have built our province and our country. So there's much more that could be done.

We're not interested in holding up this bill. It's a very small step, yes. Will it benefit a few people? Probably. They're probably people who need it the least. But let's get on with it, Madam Speaker. Let's get this through, and let's maybe hope that the government brings forward some meatier legislation, and I'm not talking about Bill 115.

I'll leave it at that. We're not putting up speakers for a reason. We want to get this House moving. We want to make this government work. Again, thanks to the member from Dufferin–Caledon. On with the show, I say.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is my pleasure to speak again to this bill, and I'm encouraged by the comments from the member from the third party about the need to get on with this bill. She's right in one way, in that this is part of something. It's part of a much bigger strategy about helping our seniors stay at home and helping them age at home with dignity and independence for those who choose to stay at home.

It absolutely will, Speaker, help create jobs through the renovations that seniors undertake under this bill. It does not require seniors to spend \$10,000. I want to clarify that for the member from Dufferin–Caledon. This bill covers renovations up to \$10,000, because some people, quite frankly, need more than a grab bar, and they will receive a bigger tax credit in that case. But for those

who need something smaller, they will have, of course, a smaller tax credit.

Speaker, as I said, this is part of a bigger strategy. We've recently announced more PSW care for people at home. That will primarily benefit seniors. We have an aging strategy in Ontario. We have more community supports in Ontario. So I think when we look at Bill 2, we have to look in the context of all the things we're doing to help those seniors who want to stay at home do that with grace, independence and dignity.

The member for Dufferin-Caledon questioned how many seniors own a home. This is about not just homeowners; this is about any tenant, any senior in their place of residence, being eligible for this credit. It's also important to emphasize that Bill 2 would allow people who own a home and have a senior at home, such as a parent or a grandparent, to claim the tax credit, so the application is much broader than what has been suggested here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's always a pleasure to follow our member from Dufferin-Caledon, and I tend to agree with her points that this Bill 2 has nothing to do with actually helping seniors and nothing to do with economic development.

Speaker, when I walked here into the front of the Legislature just the other day, I saw the graffiti that was on the statues out front. Now, thankfully our crew here are crackerjacks. The graffiti has been fixed within a couple of days. But it's more symbolic of the sentiment that's out there. People are disgruntled. They're unhappy. We have 600,000 men and women who woke up this morning without a job. We have 300,000 less manufacturing workers today than we had. Those are the issues that we need to be tackling.

This Bill 2 chips away at the fringes. It's more glow than show, Speaker. It does nothing—absolutely nothing—for the seniors. It does not do anything for the economy. Those 600,000 men and women with nothing to do this morning but go out and look for a job: Some of them have to come out here and express themselves, and I think that is the issue. The real core of the issue is that we have a disgruntled community. We have people who are fed up, who are tired of being unemployed, and this Bill 2 has absolutely no way to put those men and women to work. It does absolutely nothing to assist the seniors at all.

This bill should stop in its heels now. We should be finishing with this bill and moving on to the real core issues that are affecting society. That's what's happening out here, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, much has already been said about Bill 2: the weaknesses, the strengths. The underlying purpose to keep seniors in their home is, of course, a very important strategy and an

important issue to address, particularly when many seniors that I speak to want to be able to stay in their homes, want to be able to stay with their families. The fact that the renovation tax credit also assists loved ones who want to keep their parents in their home is a good thing. But the problem with the bill, like many people in this House have said, is that it doesn't cut to the heart of the problem. The root cause of many of our problems in this province is poverty, and we should address our remedies to poverty reduction.

The other area that I think is of paramount importance is an effective means of delivering health care and home care. The hospital-based model that we have been using to this point is not the most efficient mechanism to deliver care that would keep seniors in their home. So if we really want to address keeping seniors in their home, let's look at more community-based models like community health centres, additional funding for home care, additional funding for doctor visits at the home, nurse visits at the home. That way, we could really move towards a solution that truly puts seniors in their homes, living with dignity, and that addresses the issue directly. I think that's what we need to move towards.

The bill itself has some positive points, but again, it goes too short in terms of really addressing the issue of keeping seniors in their homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Dufferin-Caledon has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the members for Parkdale-High Park, Pickering-Scarborough East, Nipissing and Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

I did notice that the one Liberal member who commented did not give me the number that I'm looking for and, actually, the number that the member from Parkdale-High Park is also looking for, which is—you must have done the background. You must have done the studies. What percentage of seniors, what percentage of individuals who have a disability, is going to be able to tap into this program? I think it's a valid question. It's part of the debate that we should be having as we talk about the validity of the healthy homes renovation tax credit. I think it's unfortunate that they are glossing over that because even they understand that the percentage of people who are going to participate in the program is minuscule.

The Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit Act, Bill 2, has additional spending and no savings line. Once again, we are dealing with additional spending and no balance on what you are removing, what you need to wind down, what programs aren't working, aren't efficient. I would argue that within a year, you will find that Bill 2 is one of those not-working, inefficient pieces of legislation that in fact is going to be more about PR spin than actually assisting seniors and individuals who have a disability, who are going to make the renovations, who are needing to make the renovations to be able to continue to live in their family home.

I'll leave you with this: Once again, if this, Bill 2, is what we're going to talk about, is what you're going to

hang your hat on as an economic development bill, we are in a sad, sad situation in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's great to speak today. I wish it was something a little more substantial that we were speaking about, but as we've already heard this morning, Bill 2 is not substantial by any means.

It is a privilege to get up and speak in the House. There have been a lot of great visionaries who have spoken in this Legislature, and every time I stand up, I think of those great visionaries and those leaders who made the tough decisions to move the province forward—people like Bill Davis, John Robarts and Mike Harris. And now we have this Premier—not quite in the same class, that's for sure.

This Premier has failed to ever meet the challenges of our times. Bill 2 is just part of this legislative agenda, this smokescreen, to make it appear that something is happening over there. It's all about politics; nothing to do with policy. There are 600,000 men and women who woke up in this province this morning who don't have a job to go to—600,000. Some 25,000 people, just last month—that's a town about the size of Owen Sound—lost their jobs. The numbers just came out a couple of days ago. So, does this government bring in a jobs plan? No. They bring in another fluffy little bill like Bill 2 that does nothing to solve the problem. Some 16.5% of people who are under 25 are youth; they're out of work today. These are stats that really send a message, or at least should send a message, to this Premier that it's time to start making some tough decisions in Ontario.

So, are we talking about reforming apprenticeships? We are on this side. But are they doing that over there? Absolutely not. We need to create some high-paying, really good jobs in the skilled trades. This is just a government that's feathering its nest with putting its buddies at the College of Trades. This government's running a \$15.3-billion deficit and it has doubled the debt in the last nine years. Are they tackling that? No. They're bringing out Bill 2, which is a fluffy piece of legislation that's not going to have any effect at all on our seniors, which I believe is what it's aimed at doing. We'll get a little bit further into who's going to benefit from Bill 2 a little bit later on, and it's nobody. There's nobody.

I don't know how many people paid attention over the last couple of weeks to United States politics, but we did have the Republican convention a couple of weeks ago. Last week we had the Democratic convention as well. So I'd like to take this moment to quote former Democratic President of the United States Bill Clinton. He's no raging right-winger—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: With all due respect, I refer to section 23(b) of the standing orders that the speaker in debate should be adhering to the bill at hand. I'd appreciate consideration of that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. I just remind the member to refer to the bill being debated.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd be happy to do that. I just thought the members on the other side would be happy to hear a Bill Clinton quote. Can I give you the Bill Clinton quote? This is what Bill Clinton had to say last week. Bill Clinton said this: "We've got to deal with this big long-term debt problem or it will deal with us. It will gobble up a bigger and bigger percentage of the federal budget we'd rather spend on education and health care and science and technology. We've got to deal with it." Bill 2 does absolutely nothing to deal with the big debt problems in Ontario. So Bill Clinton gets it; this side of the House gets it; but unfortunately and it's quite shocking that that Premier over there doesn't get it.

I talked to a lot of seniors over the summer at different fairs and events that I was at, including one just the other night at Moira Place in Tweed. These are seniors who are on a fixed income. The average old-age security payment every month is \$540. The average Canadian pension plan payment every month is \$788. So you factor in property taxes or rent or food or gas or the biggest rising expenditure in the province of Ontario, thanks to the McGuinty government—electricity prices: How in the world are seniors expected to get the maximum out of this benefit? They have to spend \$10,000 that they don't have to try and get 15% back. Of course, there's the 13% HST that you would pay on that, so really we're talking about 2% here. That's all we're talking about when it comes to this bill: 2%. That's why they called it Bill 2, perhaps.

It is an insult to every senior on a fixed income in this province to pretend that this laughable excuse for a piece of legislation is actually going to help them. We're talking about the proverbial band-aid on the bullet hole here when it comes to Bill 2, and it's not going to help the fiscal situation in the province. We need real action on the economy, and we're simply not getting it. If we want to create jobs for contractors and subcontractor trades, then we have to reform the apprenticeship system. We've talked about that. It baffles me that the government can't seem to understand that the number of working plumbers, electricians, mechanics and millwrights is directly related to how many young people are apprenticing in those trades, and there are just not enough of them. That's why we want to expand the apprenticeship program, reduce the ratio, so we can get more skilled trades workers out there on the job. The average age of an electrician in Ontario is 65 years old, and I heard the other day that the average age of a stonemason is 73—73 years old; that's the average age of a stonemason.

0930

I was at a graduation ceremony in June at Moira Secondary School, and this young lad walked up onto the stage and went to the microphone—each of them would say what they were going to do next year, if they were going to university or college or whatever. He said he was going to go become a stonemason. I said, "Now, there's a kid who's got his act together because he's

guaranteed to get a job.” His name is Jake Anderson. I went over and introduced myself and said, “Good luck at school because you’re guaranteed to make a lot of money.” There’s just not enough of these people out there.

So here we are, anyway, debating Bill 2, which is a bill that we can’t afford, aimed at people who can’t afford it, and it’s attempting to create work for tradespeople whom we don’t even have. Let me think about that again. It’s a bill that’s going to spend money that we don’t have, aimed at people who can’t afford it, and creating jobs for tradespeople who don’t exist. Makes sense to me—sarcastic.

Mr. John Yakubuski: We got it, Todd.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I know you’ve got to tell them.

Mr. Todd Smith: I just wanted Hansard to realize.

Anyway, this is a cheap and cynical ploy just to grab votes, and that’s what it’s all about.

Let’s get down to the brass tacks of this again. I think the last time I spoke to this at second reading, I called it the wealthy homes tax credit, not the healthy homes tax credit, and really it does only pertain to people who have money. How can you go out there, a senior these days, and spend \$10,000? They just don’t have it.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: You don’t have to spend that amount.

Mr. Todd Smith: I realize you don’t have to spend it, but to get the maximum benefit, you have to spend \$10,000. Thank you for paying attention, though.

We’re talking about: You spend \$10,000, you’re going to get 15% back. You’ve got to pay 13% to the government for HST anyway, so we’re talking about 2% here. Then, of course, you figure in the tax compliance cost. I talk to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business quite often, and I was speaking with the CFIB when one of their member surveys came out. They were stating that the average small business owner spends between six and 10 hours a week dealing with regulations, the bulk of which is tax compliance. So, in addition to a bill that we can’t afford, aimed at people who can’t afford it, creating jobs for tradespeople who don’t exist, we’re now adding another layer of red tape to the system. That’s what’s happening with this bill.

Somewhere there’s someone sitting in a chair listening to this, and it makes sense to them. I worry that unfortunately it’s the guy in the Premier’s chair. It just doesn’t make any sense at all. We’ve got 600,000 Ontarians out of work; 25,000 of them—a town the size of Trenton—lost their jobs last month in Ontario. Small business confidence is at the lowest point in Ontario that it’s been in 14 months. The leaders of this province are gathered in this chamber right now. We’re not discussing how to put those 600,000 Ontarians back to work. We’re not talking about how we can improve the conditions for small business in Ontario. We’re talking about a 2% rebate—2%—on a home renovation bill that almost no one it’s targeted to will actually be able to afford. That’s what we’re talking about.

The province used to make tough decisions back in the good old days. Now, unfortunately, this government is shirking its tough decisions. This province used to have a vision, and unfortunately now it seems it fails to see beyond the end of its nose.

I look forward to the comments on my discussion on Bill 2 this morning. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I’m happy to talk on the healthy homes renovation tax credit today. I actually was at an event on the weekend, and spoke to a senior. He approached me and he said that he and his wife live at home, and he’s having a very difficult time. He actually had a walker and he let me lift the walker. It was extremely heavy. I think I’m a healthy, middle-aged woman, and here I am, I couldn’t even lift this walker. It was maybe about, I’d say, 40 pounds. His concern was that he is having trouble lifting this walker up two steps to get into his home. So he said, “You know, Teresa, I would really appreciate if you could look into if there’s some kind of program to help me. I need a ramp. I need to build a ramp in my home so I can at least stay in my home longer.”

So the light went on, and I thought, “Gosh, I could tell him about the healthy homes renovation tax credit, but that’s not going to help him.” In his case, he’s a very low-income-earner senior. His wife is also very ill, and he’s looking after his granddaughter. So in those cases we’re talking about, this is a bill that’s going to help some people, and it’s a very small sum. It’s not going to help the seniors who are really in need, who have those economic challenges that they are facing day in and day out and are trying to stay at home.

I think if this bill was really intended to help all seniors with physical disabilities who can’t afford to remain in their homes, it should have been written differently. Thank you, Speaker. I just wanted to add that to the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Speaker. It’s always a privilege for me to hear the remarks of my very learned friend from Prince Edward–Hastings and have the opportunity to chat about Bill 2.

I personally am a great admirer of Mr. Davis’s, but I remind everybody that, during his 14 years as Premier, he had 14 straight deficits.

Interjection: Fourteen.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That might be a fact that my learned friend from Prince Edward–Hastings didn’t acknowledge during that. That was 14 straight deficits.

Let me tell you, I had the opportunity to be with my friend in Stirling a couple of months ago. I was driving into Stirling and got to see Home Hardware; that’s right on the main street there in Stirling, along with Stirling Creamery—a great spot.

But when I was driving into Stirling on this day, I didn’t see the famous sign for Rob Ray. Rob Ray had a

very distinguished career in the National Hockey League and played for the Buffalo Sabres, but somehow I think they've taken the Rob Ray sign down.

But when you get into Stirling, there are a number of family-owned businesses that are in the hardware business. I took the opportunity to go into Home Hardware there, and I could see such things as grab bars, and I could see such things as special showerheads, and I could see the anticipation of those great citizens in Stirling, Ontario. Once this bill is passed, Bill 2, they'll be running into Home Hardware and they'll be buying those things to renovate their houses to make sure that mom and dad can stay in those homes longer through the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

I know that's something my good friend from Prince Edward-Hastings just missed when he made his speech this morning. These are the kinds of things that will be helpful dramatically through this bill. It has been estimated that 380,000 seniors across the province of Ontario will take advantage of this. Those fine citizens in Stirling, Ontario, will benefit from this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen to the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, and I think he was right in his assessment and dismissiveness of this bill. When you look at it, he talked about the red tape and his business friends and the regulations that are in place.

I think I'll just draw a little bit more attention here. Why are they actually doing this? First of all, we know there's an aging population. Secondly, we know that they are not building one new long-term-care bed in Ontario.

What they're doing is, they're downloading all of the responsibility to the family. Then they're saying that for community care access centres there's no money. There are not enough hours for any of my constituents who are looking for care in the home.

This is the biggest shell game I've ever seen. The tragedy with seniors is told more wholesomely and fully in an article in the *Toronto Star*, which is usually very complimentary to the Liberals. Here's what it says: Ontario is the worst in Canada "when it comes to growing poverty [and] increasing income inequity." This article goes on to say—and the report is called *Falling Behind*. It's a real commentary on Ontario today. The article says: "It is time for Ontarians—including policy-makers—to face the disturbing facts about inequality in our province." It goes on to say that it's "growing poverty and cuts to social programs." I'm not making this up. This is the *Toronto Star* saying that Ontario today is one of the worst provinces in Canada when it comes to the amount and growing of poverty.

That's shameful. Who is most affected by this? Often it's seniors, our parents, the people who don't ever call on the government. They're the ones who built this country.

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They should be ashamed with Bill 2. It's nothing but something in the window to say they're addressing the issue of seniors and poverty in Ontario. It's shameful.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Speaker, picking up on the comments of my colleague, I read the report as well, and there are some very startling issues if you look at what Ontario's position and the rest of Canada's is in terms of our ability to address the growing inequality, the growing poverty in our country. At one point we were leading the country, as a province, in terms of our investments in addressing inequality, and particularly "equality of opportunity." That was language that was used in the report: that to balance the equality of opportunity, investment needs to be made into various programs and services.

The hardest hit when it comes to poverty would be those who are most vulnerable. Those who are most vulnerable would be our two most vulnerable demographics, the young and the very old, because both face obstacles when it comes to care, accessing resources, employment—obviously, when you're very young, you can't even work. The very old face the very same issues of access to resources, ability to work. When you're on a fixed income, it's particularly troubling that the rising cost of living would impact you even more. That's obvious.

Again, looking at the perspective of seniors living in their homes, in the context of poverty and the context of how we address poverty reduction so that seniors can live in their home, this bill obviously doesn't address that. I think that's just a comment for us to reflect on so that we do come up with some bills, come up with some legislation that really addresses how we can address those who are facing poverty and their inability to face the rising cost of living.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward-Hastings has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thanks to all who provided comments, as well.

The member from London-Fanshawe, speaking on the significance of more home care: Bill 2 doesn't provide increased home care for seniors.

I was up in the northern part of my riding just the other day for a 95th birthday. Gerald Trumble is his name, and it was in Gilmour, at the community centre. There were a number of seniors who were there, of course, and I was speaking with them. That is the biggest concern out there right now: "Are we going to be able to get the care that we want and need in our home?"

I was speaking with a woman named Irene, who has two steel knees. She was telling me about the fact that she can only get care for one and a half hours a week, and she can hardly even move around her house. The care just isn't there because the money is being wasted at the provincial level on boondoggles like Ornge and cancelling power plants for \$190 million so we can save four Liberal seats. The priorities are in the wrong place with this government.

I'd like to thank the member from Peterborough as well, and I can assure him that the Rob Ray sign is still there in Stirling. Matt Cooke's name is on it as well. Stirling, of course, is Hockleyville, and I know that the Home Hardware on West Front Street was happy for the plug this morning.

The member from Durham and the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton spoke about the gap that exists in the Toronto Star story, indicating that Ontario is the worst in Canada when it comes to growing poverty. Is the government doing anything to address this problem? Are the policy-makers doing anything over there to address this problem?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Yes.

Mr. Todd Smith: The member from Scarborough East says yes. This bill certainly does not do that. This bill is just about more spending, and it's about more window dressing to make it appear that the government is doing anything.

As I said earlier, Bill 2 is all about window dressing for this government. It does absolutely nothing to help seniors get the care that they need when they need it the most.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member for Barrie.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to rise and speak again to the House about issues that affect seniors in Ontario. The topic is especially important, given that seniors make up 14.6% of our population. This percentage, by anybody's estimation, is going to skyrocket in the coming years. Thus, determining efficient, cost-effective ways of ensuring well-being to our seniors and to alleviate the financial stresses that they see and they face now and in the future is a worthwhile and necessary cause, certainly.

Yet by pursuing Bill 2, the healthy homeowners act, the Liberal government downplays the seriousness of the well-being of our senior citizens by producing a bill that is just window dressing masquerading as an initiative that serves Ontario's seniors. I'll tell you this: There are a lot of storefronts in downtown Barrie that could use some window dressing—

Interjection: Right across Ontario.

Mr. Rod Jackson: —and right across Ontario. In reality, it only helps a wealthy few who don't need it and ignores most of the real issues that seniors actually are facing today.

I've called this the "wealthy homes tax credit" before, for good reason. Let's be honest: These are tough economic times in Ontario; the Premier pointed that out yesterday himself. So I'm sure that most seniors who hear about the possibility of Bill 2 becoming law think, "Hey, I could really use a \$1,500 tax rebate"—that is, until they realize that to get the full, maximum benefit of it, they need to spend \$10,000 and it has to be on home renovations focused solely on mobility, functionality and accessibility, to receive that credit.

Given that the median income for seniors for this rebate is \$25,000 a year for singles, they would have to

spend half their income to receive a measly \$1,500 maximum at the end of their tax credit. That seems like a lot to ask.

When I've talked to seniors in Barrie, they say that they need their entire income for the everyday necessities of life, and there's little left over for expensive house renovations. Most of us don't have a lot left over for expensive home renovations, never mind people on a fixed income.

It would seem that there's only a small percentage of wealthy seniors who have the means to shell out \$10,000 or more for the home renovations—focused solely on things such as mobility, functionality and accessibility—needed to make this tax credit worthwhile.

This bill excludes most of Ontario's senior population, as other speakers have mentioned. We don't really know the true number of the people that it actually affects—namely, those with an average or lesser income, who could use financial assistance the most—in favour of only helping the wealthy, who need it the least and have the means to make those renovations, regardless of a tax credit.

Why are the Liberals planning on spending \$60 million by March, if this bill passes, on something that only helps those who probably don't even really need it? It sounds like more of the same ways that the government became known for, the waste that has put us on the path to a \$30-billion deficit if we don't take action now.

Some of my Liberal colleagues have argued that a bill that helps some is good enough, and that the fact that this bill may not help most seniors is not a good reason to oppose it. I disagree. It is exactly this "good enough" philosophy or mediocrity that has brought Ontario into this tough position of having to cut a giant deficit. Ontarians deserve and want value for their tax dollars, not a half-hearted, feel-good attempt to fix social issues by simply throwing money at them.

This bill seems to exemplify why our health care system is one of the most expensive in the world and yet ranks below our peers in quality. Among OECD countries, Canada is second from the bottom only to the United States, and even they exceed us in some measures. Ontario deserves better. Bill 2 is not good enough.

Let's face it: Thanks to hardships such as ongoing tax hikes—despite this Liberal government's promises not to raise taxes, I might add—and rapidly rising energy costs—not aided by this government's misguided focus on green energy experimentation such as wind farms—seniors are facing a rising cost of living every single day. This is not going to get any better if we continue down this path, spiralling towards a \$30-billion deficit. Bill 2 only slaps a band-aid on a wound that needs stitches.

It's easy to agree that we are all 100% for supporting the well-being of Ontario's seniors; that's obvious. To suggest otherwise is ridiculous. But let's make sure that we're all actually helping seniors—all of them, not just a few of them, not just the wealthy seniors. Beyond the obvious fact that most seniors could not even afford the necessary renovations to receive the tax credit, even if

they have the money, the tax credit does not apply to some of the things that seniors need most for living. This tax break doesn't cover important things like walking devices or wheelchairs, or general repairs like roofing, plumbing or electricity, or services such as snow removal. You know how many calls I get from seniors looking for options for snow removal because they can't afford to clear their driveways for an ambulance to pull in, in case of emergency?

These are financial costs of everyday life in Ontario. These are the types of burdens that seniors have been telling me they actually need help with, and these are the costs that we should be focusing on. After all, what's the point of having wider hallways for your wheelchair if you can't afford to buy one in the first place? What's the point of spending half your yearly income on a wheelchair if you can't afford your hydro bill?

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If we truly focused on helping seniors, we would be debating bills that target the high costs of energy; ways to make our health care system more efficient; ways to provide more beds for a seniors' home; and providing the resources to enable better home care—just to name a few—not spending months of valuable time debating a costly, ineffective and wasteful bill that does little to address the true stresses that seniors face on a day-to-day basis in Ontario.

This seems to me like another example of mismanagement and irresponsibility on the part of this government—the same mismanagement that allowed eHealth, Ornge and even the upcoming ARL, that is spiraling out of control; the same as the looming \$30-billion deficit that is before us.

Mr. John O'Toole: What's the ARL?

Mr. Rod Jackson: The ARL is the air-rail link.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, yes.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Yes.

Let me take a moment to speak about the cost of this bill, or rather, \$60 million by March alone, not to mention that the program has not been costed out for yearly expenses. Bill 2 may produce some expensive surprises at the end of the year.

There's also no mention of where this funding for this bill would come from—sort of an important point when this government is running a huge debt. Usually, you figure that stuff out before you spend it, not after you spend it.

These two things seem to be both odd and irresponsible, given the extensive reformatations necessary to keep our province afloat and our finances afloat, as dictated in the recent Drummond report. Remember the Drummond report?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I do.

Mr. Rod Jackson: That's good.

By the way, given that Mr. Drummond was given \$1,500 a day for his work, you'd think this government would take the suggestions of their dear, well-compensated friend maybe just a little bit more seriously.

If we continue down this road, we'll not only be neglecting the well-being of seniors today, but we will be ill-equipped to help the quickly aging population of middle-class Ontarians who are concerned about the adequacy of their retirement income and their levels of coverage. With a growing number of seniors, it is not only important that we find ways to alleviate excess financial strains but that we get it right. We can't afford not to, and this bill certainly cannot afford not to get it right.

Right now, most middle-income Ontarians are not saving enough to guarantee a decent income and quality of life into retirement. Given the tough reality of the economy that Ontarians face, it means that Ontarians will continue to have little money left over to save for retirement in the future.

Just recently, I visited a few retirement homes. They now have a new tax, or fee, or whatever you'd like to call it today—\$10 a month. They're already complaining about 10 extra dollars, because they can't increase their income. They're on a fixed income. You can't keep squeezing these people. You've got to actually help them where it means something.

I feel like it would be impossible to justify this expensive bill to ordinary Ontarians who are just wondering why we seem to be spending enormous amounts of money giving tax breaks to the rich, who could afford to benefit from this bill, when they are worried about putting food on their table, keeping their kids in university and how they're even supposed to save enough for retirement when their job may be on the line; nor could I justify the healthy homeowners act to a caregiver who supports an elderly parent living at home and is worried about how he or she will be able to pay the hydro bill and fix that leaky plumbing in the basement. He or she can't afford the \$10,000 in renovations that would do nothing to increase the value of their house. It seems ridiculous to say, "Well, she could spend less and still get a break."

Let's be honest: A 15% tax credit on even a \$500 investment is only a paltry \$75, not even enough to get groceries for a month—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It might fill your car.

Mr. Rod Jackson: It might fill your car, yes.

Enough is enough. Ontarians want and deserve better. It's time that this government starts addressing the real issues at hand. Stop giving window dressing to real problems. Let's talk about stimulating the economy and getting our spending back on track. It's time for this government to remember that value and quality matter and pay off in the long run.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened to the member from Barrie. He made some important points. Certainly, if anybody read that report on the state of Ontario, we would be shocked to discover that we are 10th out of 10 in just about every marker in terms of economic or ethical health, I would say, because any province that's willing to tolerate the levels of poverty and joblessness we are needs to give its head a shake.

We hear from across the aisle that the government has been doing something about this. Well, Madam Speaker, they've had nine years—nine years—only one of which has been a minority government. The rest has been a majority government. They could have done anything they wanted to do legislatively, and yet, nine years later, we are in this situation in Ontario.

And seniors play a part in that, because many of our seniors live in poverty. Let me tell you that the two reasons that seniors have to leave their homes have nothing to do with this tax credit. (1) It's that they can't afford their energy bills or their property taxes, and those are significant; or (2) that they need human help in the home. To the member who says, "Well, it's not just about the \$10,000 that you put in; you can actually spend less and get a tax credit," quite frankly, putting grab bars around a bathtub is not the reason seniors can stay in their homes or have to leave their homes. That's proven. Not only that, but if you look at Quebec, who did it better, you can actually get the money up front for doing some necessary renovations. This doesn't even kick in until tax time, so you have to put the money up front, and seniors don't have any money to put up front. They barely have money, many of them, to pay the rent, pay the mortgage and pay for food. He's absolutely right. This is window-dressing. However, here's our point in the New Democratic Party: It helps a few; very few.

We say, let's move on. We're trying to make this government work. We want to move this legislation through so we can get to what we really need, we hope.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: It gives me great pleasure to speak today to this tax credit in support of seniors. I've heard from seniors in my riding who want to stay in their homes. We know that one of the greatest reasons for senior hospital visits is falls, falls that could be avoided by grab bars, by lifts, by specific medical supplies.

This is but one support that will assist seniors. Let's look at some of the supports that we've provided: energy and property tax credits, personal income tax cuts, an Ontario sales tax credit, property tax grants and improvements to home care services. These are all elements of our Aging at Home strategy, a strategy that contains a number of elements to help seniors stay healthy and to live with dignity and independence in the comfort of their own homes.

I was a member of the committee that reviewed this bill, where delegations came forward from seniors' groups, from suppliers, from contractors, all of whom are supportive and want to see this move forward. I was there when delegations were aghast with the holdups that were taking place at committee over this bill.

We heard from the March of Dimes of Canada, who said that this was a needed complementary tool; from CARP, who polled their membership, over half of whom indicated they would use this tax credit; from the Alzheimer Society, who told us that they congratulated the government for taking a step forward in helping

seniors, that this responded directly to the concerns they hear from caregivers. We heard from the Ontario Home Builders' Association, who called it a tremendous opportunity; Motion Specialties, who indicated that this would be a welcome program. For all the comments against this bill that we're not providing enough, I say again: At least this government has a strategy. Through various elements outlined above, we are helping thousands of our seniors throughout the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Again, I've spoken to this bill before, but my esteemed colleague from Barrie makes some very good points, that, again, this is just window dressing, and this government has become very good at dressing up the windows. It's almost like Christmas, and you're a little kid walking by the store and you see all the great little things that Home Hardware has to offer, but even though there are great items in the Home Hardware, both in Stirling—and I would also suggest there is a great Home Hardware in Campbellford, on Grand Road. My esteemed colleague from Peterborough might want to check it out. It's a new facility, and it's great to have them in town. They do wonderful things.

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But getting to the point of what this bill actually does for seniors: Again, the NDP and ourselves make some very strong points that the individuals who are going to actually access this benefit already have the money to invest in home renovation so that they can stay in their homes. It sounds good. I mean, I truly believe that this government's intentions were there to do the right thing, but as we've seen over and over again, this government doesn't think through the process and doesn't think about the actual impact it is going to have.

Again, when I was door-knocking, and when I'm out in my riding even to this day, Madam Speaker, seniors on fixed incomes cannot afford to even stay in their homes because of the skyrocketing price of utilities. So this bill is nothing more than window dressing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I also agree with my colleague from the opposition that this is another half-measure bill brought forward by the Liberals: \$10,000—who can afford \$10,000 with seniors?

Madam Speaker, 20% of the people in my riding live below the poverty level; they can't even pay their hydro bill. These are the people who live in terrible conditions, housing that requires more insulation, houses that need new windows, things like this. They can't afford that.

I don't know where this government thinks that this is going to be beneficial. It's only going to be beneficial to maybe the upper middle class or even higher. They can afford—who can afford to borrow \$10,000 in the first place to get the work done?

If you borrow the \$10,000, then you've got to pay the tradespeople to put it in, and they're going to charge HST on their services. It eliminates the whole process.

Then they say, "Well, you don't have to spend \$10,000. You can spend \$2,000 on something for your home." What kind of benefit are you going to get on \$2,000 after you pay HST and you borrow the money to do it? There are very small, small savings.

It reminds me of the bill they brought forward for sports. They're going to give every family \$50 a year or \$100, depending on the sport. I could sharpen my skates maybe five or six times when I played hockey for \$50. What is that going to do? I mean, it's almost an insult. If you really want to help somebody, maybe help them with their cost of signing up to play, their registration fees, if you're going to do something. Take the HST off of that.

But the things they're doing are just to please the public, to make it look like they're helping seniors, like they're helping children. They're doing all these things. It's just a fog screen they're putting forward. These things are ineffective. They're small. They're Timbits, if you want to call it that way. I hope the public is not buying it and that they understand that this is another ruse by the Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Barrie has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Thank you for the comments from my colleagues. There's one thing that's certainly clear, and it's that it's time to get serious about this stuff. This is a half measure, clearly, that doesn't really do what it says it's going to do. It doesn't benefit seniors in any wholesome, fulsome way to stay in their homes.

The things that are kicking seniors out of their homes are the fact that they can't afford their insurance, they can't afford the roofing, they can't afford their property taxes, they can't afford the upkeep of their property. They can't afford the roofing; they can't afford the average things that all of us pay for in our homes. What does this do to help them with that?

What about people who, when I go to their homes, they tell me about how—I tell this story a lot, but it's really telling—they actually have their finances out of jars? They have a jar for the food and a jar for their heating and a jar for their rent and a jar for whatever else. When one of those jars runs out, they've got to go into the next jar. That means they're sacrificing something, something like their rent that month, something like their food that month. They're sacrificing something. What about helping them?

What about helping the seniors that are actually in homes who have already been kicked out of their homes? You're actually charging them \$10 a month on a whole different subject. So you're actually taking money from them, too. Is that to pay for this? I don't know.

These are the people, my mom and dad, your mom and dad, and some of these people sitting here in this room, like the member from Durham perhaps, who have a real concern about where this is going. We need to take care of this growing number of seniors in our province, and we're not doing it in a real fulsome, wholesome way.

If you really want to get serious and you really want to help them and you really want to make a difference, do

something about it. Don't put window dressing on it. Actually stand up, take a stand and do something to help these people stay in their homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: To put things in context, today is September 11, and the member from Dufferin-Caledon, in her opening remarks, reminded each of us how important today is in terms of protecting democracy.

Isn't it ironic that today we're also going to vote on Bill 115, which is expunging rights of teachers, some of whom are here today? I think that this speaks very loudly to Premier McGuinty. This bill number 2 is an example—and I'm going to use some of the terms that have been used by people here. It's a bill of half measures, it's a bill of window dressing, and it's a bill—some people say it's a lot to do about nothing.

The real issue here—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: See how they've come alive now. They haven't said a word this morning—not a word this morning—and now, all of a sudden, they've been engaged. It's so sad when you think of it—of the real goals and what the plan here is of this government. It is tragic now that they're barracking over there.

I'll put it in a broader context. Here's what the bill is. Listen up, and you'll actually learn something that's actually true.

This bill number 2 is a healthy homes tax credit. Here's what's really happening: They have not built one single long-term-care bed, so there's nowhere for seniors to go.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: When you have your time, you can explain all that you did.

The next thing they did, Madam Speaker, was, they actually started to regulate. They had a regulation to govern retirement homes. Now here's the issue as well.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Listen to Mr. Duguid over there.

The retirement homes issue is this: There isn't five cents of government money in a retirement home, and yet by setting this up, there's going to be a tax on seniors in retirement homes now, thanks to the McGuinty government. They've increased the costs of even retirement homes, but there's no provincial money in them.

The context of Bill 2 is this: They're going to say Aging at Home—that's the strategy. Now, what does the Aging at Home strategy really mean? It actually means aging alone at home, because if you listen to your constituents, the seniors, they're going to tell you they can't get any hours of care. What are the people in remote and rural Ontario going to do—have a nurse drive for four hours so they can get private-duty nursing or care?

This bill is nothing but window dressing, as has been said by almost all of the speakers this morning.

In a broader sense, an article that I referred to earlier, dated August 30, in the *Toronto Star*—and its title is this: "Ontario Worst for Inequality." It starts out by pro-

claiming that, under Premier McGuinty, “Ontario is the worst in Canada when it comes to growing poverty, increasing income inequality....”

It goes on to say, “‘It is time for Ontarians—including our policy-makers—to face the disturbing facts about inequality in our province,’ says the report entitled *Falling Behind: Ontario’s Backslide into Widening Inequality, Growing Poverty and Cuts to Social Programs.*”

That’s the real statement here, and that’s why they’re so silent.

They really have become quite elitist, I believe, in their attitude that we don’t need the teachers anymore. “We don’t need the public sector. We don’t need anyone. We can do it. I’m Premier McGuinty, and I’m infallible,” or whatever.

My point is this: This bill is just exactly what most people understand it to be: window dressing.

Here’s the real issue. To get the full credit of the \$1,000, it’s important to recognize that you have to spend \$10,000. Now, if you spend \$10,000, you’re going to have spent \$1,300 in tax—that’s with the HST—because there’s tax on the labour and the services, and there’s tax on the permits, all of which is revenue to the province. But what are they giving you back? They’re giving you part of your HST back.

The seniors who can afford to do this—it’s shameful. This government should be ashamed of what they’ve done to seniors. They’re ramming this stuff down their throats like they are on many occasions to a lot of issues.

So I stand here myself, listening to the speeches in the last month or two—

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m quite concerned that even the cabinet ministers that are here and yelling back to me, trying to overshoot the person that’s trying to make some input—what I want you to do here is this: Take a second look at this bill. Take a look at this bill, and try and actually get it right. Give the HST back to people, at least.

I’m quite amazed, Madam Speaker, that they’ve been silent for the last couple of minutes. I hope they’re contrite that what I’ve said—all of which is true. There are less long-term-care beds, less home care, and less money for health care in this province, especially drugs. Who’s going to be most affected? The seniors.

This bill, which in the budget is forecast to be \$60 million, is a drop in the bucket of what’s really needed to make homes accommodate persons to age in their own homes, which I believe would be the preferred choice. But there have to be other options for people that are available and accessible to the families in Ontario today. Most of us should reflect for a moment and think of our own parents or loved ones or those with special needs, because they’re the ones that are being left behind, as referred to in the article that I cited in the *Toronto Star*. The *Toronto Star* is generally very amicable with the Liberal Party. In fact, I would call the *Toronto Star* the Liberal briefing notes. Basically, that’s what they are.

The founder of the *Toronto Star*, Joe Atkinson, was honoured this past weekend in my riding because he was actually born in my riding, in Newcastle. “Holy Joe” is what they called him. He was a wonderful person, a caring person. You tell me in your two-minute response to my remarks here this morning—

Mr. Paul Miller: There won’t be any.

Mr. John O’Toole: Anyway, in my two-minute response, I want to hear them say that I’m right.

Interjection: You’ll be waiting a long time, John.

Mr. John O’Toole: I’d like them to refute what I’ve said. I put it out there. Say what they’re going to do; that’s what debate is about.

Bill 2 was introduced in November, right after the election. It was kind of an olive branch to the seniors, who are being left behind. We’ve been talking about it for ages now. November 23 was when it was introduced. It’s quite a small bill in terms of what it actually does, but there are so many rules of how you qualify for the money, what qualifies and what does not qualify. If it increases the value of your home, it doesn’t qualify.

Interjections.

Mr. John O’Toole: Obviously this gentleman from Ottawa hasn’t read the bill. I question if he has even read it. They’ve just got the speaking notes handed to them, and they read them. That’s all they do. It’s shameful. I tell you, I’m waiting until this afternoon, because there will be a few people here this morning and this afternoon when the vote occurs, and I want to see what they are really standing up for—the people of Ontario, or are they just absent without excuses?

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I’d like to have had more time.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s my pleasure to introduce and to welcome the mother and older brother of page Zakhar Husak, Ms. Danusia Burdyk-Husak and Lukian Husak, who are visiting us today in the gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As always, we welcome our guests.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I’d like to introduce a representative from the OSSTF, Heather McGill, who is in our gallery behind us. Welcome.

Hon. John Milloy: I’d like to welcome Leah Nelson. She’s in the members’ gallery today. She’s a first-year global and political studies student at York University who’s visiting Queen’s Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Further introductions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I would like to introduce Fred Hahn, head of CUPE Ontario, in today’s audience.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? Seeing none, I would ask that our pages gather to be introduced. It's too easy. It's too easy.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask that all members join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages, serving for the first session of the 40th Parliament: from Etobicoke Centre, Christina Boothby; from Thornhill, Roberto Fusciardi; from Oak Ridges–Markham, Parnika Godkhindi; from Mississauga South, Jasper Hébert; from Hamilton Centre, Zakhar Husak; from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Patrick Kyte; from Brampton–Springdale, Simran Mann; from Etobicoke–Lake Shore, Sydney McCluskey; from Mississauga–Brampton South, Sashin Narayan; from Ottawa Centre, Mathilde Papillon; from Ajax–Pickering, Katherine Parker; from Whitby–Oshawa, Andrew Rudback; from Oxford, Jenna Rutherford; from Niagara Falls, Ethan Seaver; from Peterborough, Maya Stibbards-Lyle; from Mississauga–Erindale, Maggie Street; from Beaches–East York, Caelius Tarantino; from Trinity–Spadina, Leo Toueg; from Scarborough–Agincourt, Anna Wang; and from Halton, Jacqueline Wu.

Welcome, and thank you.

Applause.

MEMBER'S PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On Monday, August 27, 2012, the member from Newmarket–Aurora, Mr. Klees, rose on a point of privilege concerning an anonymous document that had been distributed to members of this House, the Queen's Park press gallery and an undetermined number of other individuals. In his point of privilege, the member claimed that the document, entitled *The Frank Klees Report*, impugned his integrity and that it was clearly intended to intimidate and obstruct him from carrying out his duties as they are related to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the committee's review of the Auditor General's report on Ornge air ambulance. After reviewing the member's written submission and the Hansard from August 27, I am now prepared to give my ruling.

Parliamentary privilege is defined by Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice* as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively ... and by members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their function, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals."

Included in these rights, as enumerated in the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, is the member's freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation. The text notes that "The unjust damaging of a member's good name might be seen as constituting an obstruction if the member is prevented from performing his or her parliamentary functions."

The document in question raised by Mr. Klees, which is undated, contains seven pages of resumé-style infor-

mation about the member's educational background and purported involvement in a number of business ventures. In making his point of privilege, the member from Newmarket–Aurora drew a parallel between the existence of this document affecting him and the posting of videos on YouTube earlier this year that directly targeted the Canadian Minister of Public Safety, the Honourable Vic Toews.

After reviewing the document of which the member complains, I have to say that I'm not able to find a realistic threat, specific or general, against the member from Newmarket–Aurora. This is an important consideration when considering the relevance of the Toews matter in the case at hand.

A key aspect of House of Commons Speakers Scheer's finding of the *prima facie* case of privilege in support of Mr. Toews was his conclusion that, "When duly elected members are personally threatened for their work in Parliament, whether introducing a bill, making a statement or casting a vote, this House must take the matter very seriously." Speaker Scheer went on to say, "I have carefully reviewed the online videos in which the language used does indeed constitute a direct threat to the minister in particular, as well as other members. These threats demonstrate a flagrant disregard of our traditions and a subversive attack on the most fundamental privileges of this House."

The Klees document, while sinister and disturbing in its own right, does not rise to the level of an obvious threat directed to the minister last February.

In further considering how to address this point of privilege, I have found the following passage from *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, by Joseph Maingot, to be helpful. He states, "Whether a parliamentary privilege is violated depends on the nature and extent of any particular privilege claimed by Parliament in relation to the circumstances of the time, the underlying test in all cases being whether the right claimed as a privilege is one which is absolutely necessary for the due execution of the powers of Parliament. Therefore, all interferences with members' privileges of freedoms of speech, such as editorial or other public comment, are not breaches of privilege even though they influence the conduct of members in their parliamentary work. Accordingly, not every action by an outside body which may influence the conduct of a member of Parliament as such could now be regarded as a breach of privilege, even if it were calculated and intended to bring pressure on the member to take or refrain from taking a particular course. But any attempt by improper means to influence a member in his parliamentary conduct is a breach of privilege. What constitutes an improper means of interfering with members' parliamentary work is always of question depending on the facts of the case. Finally, there must be some connection between the material alleged to contain the interference and the parliamentary proceeding."

1040

Also on this theme, the 24th edition of Erskine May on page 263 states, "Written imputations, as affecting a member of Parliament, may amount to contempt, with-

out, perhaps, being libels at common law, but to constitute a contempt a libel upon a member must concern the character or conduct of the member in that capacity.”

In reviewing the Klees document, I can find no single connection between it and, as the member claims, his work on the public accounts committee or any other parliamentary proceeding. The member alleges this connection, and claims an attempt to intimidate him as a consequence, but the document itself is completely silent on the member's parliamentary work. Further, the member for Newmarket–Aurora has made no claim that the document interfered with his ability to perform his normal parliamentary roles, including his work on the public accounts committee.

I am therefore unable to find that a *prima facie* breach of privilege has been made out.

However, I have previously referred to the sinister nature of the document in question. While not expressly stated by its unknown author, this unsigned document can realistically serve no other purpose than to attempt to impugn the integrity of its subject. It was prepared and presented in a matter that invites the reader to accept its innuendo and its litany of guilt by association as fact.

I therefore join the chorus of condemnation that members from all parties of this House expressed on the day the member for Newmarket–Aurora raised his point of privilege, and I hope the likes of documents such as this one will not be seen again.

I thank the members for their contributions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm continuing with the Premier on our call for closing down health bureaucracy so we can invest in better patient care, more nurses and personal support workers.

My question is to the Premier. You've created these new bureaucracies of middle management called LHINs. You've put North York in with Cook's Bay, while Scarborough is in the same LHIN as Borden; Northwest Toronto is in a LHIN with Caledon. Basically you sliced up Toronto into five different pieces, and grouped different parts of Toronto with areas outside of the Toronto area.

So Premier, can you tell me: What is the community of interest between North York and Cook's Bay, between Scarborough and Borden? How do these boundaries make any sense?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted that the member opposite is actually starting to ask questions about LHINs and the good work they do.

To answer that question, Speaker, the boundaries of the LHINs were determined based on referral patterns.

People come from an area around Scarborough, for example, to receive services there. So there is logic behind those boundaries.

But I think it's important to say that our health care system serves all people in Ontario. Those LHIN boundaries do not exist for patients. They deserve to get the care they need, where they need it, when they need it.

That is what we are committed to continuing to do: to strengthen the LHINs and to bring more providers into the LHINs. I look forward to the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm not sure if I got it. I didn't get an answer from the Premier, because these boundaries make no sense whatsoever. They're not in the interests of patients or health care. The community of interest—if you want to argue somehow and tie yourself into a pretzel, Premier, that Scarborough and Borden have that community, or Cook's Bay and North York.

We have a better model, Speaker: to actually have it in the community, to build on hospitals that are working and to knit together the various parts of our system between home care, community care, hospital care and long-term care. Instead of having people getting the run-around, instead of having people in our offices in tears because their mom or dad can't get a long-term-care bed, work together, eliminate the middle management and invest in patient care. Even Don Drummond said your current system of LHINs is not working.

Choose a path. Are you doing LHINs 2.0 or a better path, one that organizes by the community, in the best interests of patients and invests in front-line care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I think if there's anyone confused here, it's the Leader of the Opposition. I'm just confused. Are you talking about eliminating LHINs, or are you talking about moving those boundaries?

The work that we are doing to improve health care is getting demonstrated results. But I have to say, I did have a chance to read your pathway to nowhere paper, and it contains some very alarming language. Let me read from page 12 of your document. The Ontario PCs clearly state they want to create “competition between hospitals and independent health facilities.”

So my question for the Leader of the Opposition is: Is this the Shaun Francis solution? Are you actually setting up for private delivery of health care in the province of Ontario? It's time for you to come clean and admit—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Leader.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm glad the minister actually now has taken the time to read our document, because it is the right path forward. A new approach is going to improve patient care.

So the minister asks about page 12. Here's the example that we talk about: the Kensington eye clinic, which is doing eye surgeries, I think on a contract from the University Health Network, and that was actually approved by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government and probably Minister Matthews. So I don't know

if you're flip-flopping now, if you're saying that the Kensington eye clinic should be shut down. If that's the case, Minister, say that's where you now stand.

I disagree. I think they're doing a good job there, paid for under the OHIP umbrella: more procedures, better-quality care. I don't know why you're turning your back on something you actually did right for a change.

Let me ask you this, Minister. In your own backyard, the South West LHIN has hit two out of 14 of their goals. Do you give two out of 14 a passing grade?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am even more concerned now than I was when I read the document—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When I stand, you stop.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am more concerned now than I was when I read the document, because I thought, when the Leader of the Opposition actually asked the question straight up, "Are you opening the door to for-profit delivery?" he would stand in his place and say no. The Kensington model that he talks about is one that we believe in and talk about in our action plan. It is a not-for-profit model.

The people of this province want to know from the opposition: Are you for for-profit delivery or are you committed to not-for-profit delivery in our hospitals?

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Honest to God, this minister must be so distracted by Ornge and her failure to get a deal with the doctors that she has no idea what's actually going on in her own Ministry of Health today, this September of 2012.

You've done this with Kensington health clinic. You've done it with other cornea replacements, for example. You've done it with Shouldice. The list goes on. If you're going to close those down, then get on your feet today and say you're going to close them down. But we've got a better approach that actually invests in patient care, coordinates care, because, right now, under Dalton McGuinty, if you don't fight like hell for a loved one in the health care system, too often you get left behind. We'll put patients, not bureaucrats, at the centre of our system.

I'll ask the minister the question that she dodged. In your very own backyard, two out of 14 of the goals were hit by the South West LHIN. I know you've got a lot of friends there. You may have helped to appoint the CEO. But if they only hit two out of 14 of their goals, why did you give the CEO a pay raise when we're supposed to have pay freezes across the board?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, you know, yesterday we called the document "pathway to nowhere." In fact, I think today we can confirm that the title of that document should be "pathway to privatization." The op-

position party has put forth a plan that will take us in the direction of US health care. There are many examples internationally that we should be looking at, but the US model is not one of them.

We remain committed to not-for-profit delivery in our hospitals, and I would like the opposition to stand up and say, "We, too, are committed to the Ontario model, the Canadian model of not-for-profit health care." Will he or will he not do that? Clarify this issue.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem, Speaker, is that this minister is committed to the bureaucratic model of health care. Ours is one that puts patients first and brings services together.

Minister, two out of 14 targets were met by the South West LHIN, your own region. Your good friend Michael Barrett was given a pay raise under your leadership for hitting two out of 14 targets, when I thought people were supposed to have their wages frozen. What does this mean for average families in southwestern Ontario? Cancer wait times did not hit the target; cataract surgery—way above target; patients needing hip replacement surgery in the South West LHIN—way beyond target; knee replacement surgery—outside of target; and emergency length of stay—too long.

We will take out the layers of bureaucracy, the middle management, stop the paper-pushing from going to the inbox, to the outbox, and invest in nurses, personal support workers and health care, not bureaucrats. Why won't you take a better path forward?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Another quick reminder that when you're asking the question, the members might want to let the question be put—and the same with the answers.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know the Leader of the Opposition has a newfound interest in health care, so let me educate the member opposite about wait times in the South West LHIN. Hip replacement has gone down by 215 days, a 62% decrease; knee replacement wait times have dropped by 153 days from when you were in charge, down 43%; cataract surgery is down by 23 days; MRI outpatients by 58 days—it's been cut in half; CT outpatients by 49 days—since you were in charge, we have cut CT wait times in half.

Are we there yet? No. Are we well on our way? Yes, we are.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: That is a recipe for failure. Two out of 14 of your goals? That's not on the way to progress; that's going backwards. I wouldn't give the guy a raise; I'd fire him and actually clear out the whole bureaucracy.

Minister, the LHIN in my home area, the Hamilton Niagara LHIN, is no better: two out of 14 targets hit. We've got a brand new, shiny LHIN office for the bureaucrats who don't spend a minute with patients, and

the hospital has gone nowhere. That's not progress; that's a step backwards.

This is our plan, a path for prosperity: patient-centred health care that puts the interests of the patients first. Your plan—a byway to bureaucracy, a detour to deficits, a road map to the runaround for patients—is going to come to an end. Our plan will put patients at the centre of the health care system.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we're very concerned about the member opposite's commitment to privatize the delivery of health care. We're also very concerned about his plan to eliminate oversight. He wants to fire 4,000 nurses. That is in the plan. You want to eliminate the oversight that we think is vitally important.

When they were in office—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The members will come to order, and when I'm standing, there's no talking. Thank you.

Minister, finish.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this paper that was released yesterday is nothing but a recipe for disaster. It is full of holes. It does not hold water. It will eliminate the oversight and responsibility to ensure that the money goes to the right places so that people get the care they need.

We've made tremendous progress. There's more to do. I'm proud of the work we've done. This is not a solution.

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Last fall, the Premier campaigned on a plan to deal with Ontario's deficit. I have a simple question: Does the Premier still stand beside the plan? Does he stand by the plan that he campaigned on just about a year ago?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I certainly stand by the budget that was so enthusiastically supported by my honourable colleague, the leader of the NDP.

Our plan, at the highest—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, that plan consists, at the highest level, of doing what Ontario families want us to do. They want us to get hold of the deficit; they want us to put in place a plan that provides for its elimination over time in a responsible way. They want us to protect the quality of education we deliver to their children. They want to protect the quality of health care that's delivered to everybody in the family. That is our

plan. That's what we intend to keep moving forward on, and we're pleased to have the very support of the leader of the NDP with respect to the plan as it's found in our budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier had known about the financial challenges facing this province for some time—at least, he should have. Why did he, during last fall's election, explicitly promise not to introduce the sort of simplistic, unconstitutional legislation that he's planning on passing in a little while?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, if my honourable colleague is advocating for a social contract-type approach, we reject that. I want to make that perfectly clear. My honourable colleague believes we should be giving teachers a pay hike. She believes we should be giving doctors a pay hike. She believes we should be giving everybody in the broader public sector a pay hike. She also believes that we should subsidize horse racing in Ontario and we should subsidize the ONTC. That's not leadership; that's follower-ship.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Leadership is about making decisions. It's about making choices on behalf of Ontario families, and families are saying to us, "Give our kids a quality education and give us a strong economy so my child, when she grows up, has access to a good job," and that's what we're delivering on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what I can tell you for sure is that I believe that respectful conversations with all of the people who make this province work is the only leadership that we need in Ontario.

Parents want what's best for their daughters and sons when they send them to school in the morning. But when they look at their government, they see a Premier who is passionately arguing for the same plan that he passionately argued against not even a year ago. How can the parents of this province trust this Premier when he's putting forward a plan that he himself dismissed as being reckless and simplistic?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think Ontario parents know where we stand when it comes to publicly funded education in Ontario.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Northumberland will come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They know we stand for smaller classes. They know we stand for higher test scores. They know we stand for higher graduation rates. They know we stand—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: No, you don't. You lowered the bar.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Northumberland is warned.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They know we stand for a full-day kindergarten program. It's the first program of its kind in North America. I think this year we'll open our doors to 120,000 three-, four- and five-year-olds. By 2014, it'll be open to 250,000 of our youngest learners. That sets them on a path for progress in achievement not just in elementary school but in secondary school and in post-secondary education as well. Ontario parents know where we stand when it comes to publicly funded—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Do the honourable thing, Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As the warning was given, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West is named.

Stop the clock, please.

Mr. Milligan was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

1100

TEACHERS' CONTRACTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What I can tell you is that last week, the people of Kitchener—Waterloo decided that they were not going to support a government that first and foremost stands for Liberals. Parents want a plan that puts their kids first, and they're tired of a government that seems to do anything but that.

Even the Premier's own MPPs are scrambling to distance themselves from this simplistic and unconstitutional plan. Why is the Premier so determined to push ahead with a plan that he himself has criticized, he himself knows won't work and his own MPPs can't even support?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I would recommend to my honourable colleague that she in fact read, if not the wording of the actual decisions in both the Supreme Court of Canada and the Ontario Court of Appeal—that she at least get a hold of a summary prepared by an independent third party.

If my honourable colleague takes a long, hard look at the legislation, she will understand. What it does, Speaker, is it protects some 20,000 jobs inside our schools; it protects the progress we continue to make in full-day kindergarten; it protects smaller class sizes; it protects progress inside our schools. That's what it does. It strikes an appropriate balance, given our fiscal times.

My honourable colleague honestly feels that it's appropriate at this point in our history that we give teachers a pay hike; we disagree.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier believes that his simplistic legislation is going to stand up to a court challenge, but what he refuses to acknowledge is that more and more legal experts are coming forward to express their serious concerns. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says that they doubt that the bill is constitutional. Professors at Osgoode Hall Law School note that the fact that you've simply bargained for six months—or any period of time—isn't the case law.

That's what they're saying at Osgoode Hall. I'd ask the Premier to listen to some of those experts.

The Premier says this is going to work; they say he's wrong. Why should anybody believe him?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate my honourable colleague's interpretations of the jurisprudence, Speaker, but I see it a little bit differently.

I think we have a shared responsibility, I would argue, to find a way, at this point in time, to ensure that we are moving towards balancing our budget, understanding that more than one half of the money that we spend in government goes into compensation; understanding that the fair, practical, reasonable, responsible and, by the way, lawful thing for us to do is to hit the pause button for a couple of years, not just with respect to teachers but with respect to doctors, with respect to all of our broader public sector partners, and to do that in a way that protects the quality of public services and protects jobs. We think that's exactly what our families want us to do. We think it's fair, balanced and thoughtful, and that's what we're going to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, parents want to see kids in the classroom; they don't want to see turmoil in our schools. They want to see a plan that puts students first, not the Liberal Party first.

The Premier brought forward a plan that he knows won't work to push an agenda that people simply are not buying. Will the Premier listen to parents, to legal experts, to educational workers and to his own MPPs and put the brakes on this reckless, reckless plan today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let's try to assess the reckless character of what has happened so far: Schools are open; teachers are in the schools; full-day kindergarten is continuing to expand; we're maintaining small class sizes; test scores have just gone up once again; we are maintaining our efforts to increase the graduation rate; we have a 30%-off tuition grant for our college and university students, Speaker, that has benefited our families in a challenging period of our economy. If my honourable colleague categorizes that as reckless, then I suggest that she look up the definition of "reckless" in the dictionary.

I think we are on track. We're doing what we need to do, and we're putting the needs of students and families first.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Minister, when your government created the LHINs in 2006, you also made a promise to conduct a review, a comprehensive review, of their performance by 2010. It's now 2012 and this review still has not been conducted. Minister, what are you trying to hide?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm happy to have my critic back. What I can tell you is that the review of the LHINs is proceeding. We have gone through the appropriate process to get that review started by an all-party committee.

I look forward to hearing what people have to say about how we can make our LHINs stronger. I look forward to hearing about what we need to do to get better care for patients.

I also want to hear from the critic herself: Do you support privatized health care? Are you part of the Shaun Francis lobby to open up our hospitals to for-profit delivery? I am hoping that the reason your name was not on that document is because you are committed to not-for-profit delivery of health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Minister, your LHINs are collectively only meeting 23% of their targets—it's pathetic. The Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN met only two of 14 targets. Similarly, the Central West LHIN also met only two of 14 targets. But even worse than that, the North East LHIN met only one of 14 targets.

Minister, if you're so proud of the LHINs' conduct, why don't you conduct the review that your own legislation mandates? Again, I have to ask you: What are you trying to hide?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me try to be clearer this time. That review will happen. We have submitted the appropriate documentation. We're ready to move forward with that review, because we're committed to continuing to improve patient care.

On this issue of privatization, I'm nervous. The member from Newmarket–Aurora ran for the PC leadership on the platform of privatizing health care. He was not successful in that leadership bid. I want to know: Is the PC Party committed to not-for-profit delivery, or are you opening up the door to for-profit delivery? That is the most important question we need you answering.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. A new report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives once again confirms Ontario's record on affordability of post-secondary education in Canada. Get ready for the results: dead last. According to the CCPA, sending a kid to university in Ontario is almost three times more expensive than in Newfoundland.

The minister is reviewing post-secondary education, but this review isn't addressing the growing challenge that middle-income families face in paying for university or college. When will the government make post-secondary education affordable for Ontario families?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's fascinating to me that the party opposite, when in government, cut student aid by 50%—50% when you sat over here. When we came to power, the budget for student aid was \$380 million. This year, it will be over \$1 billion.

In 1991 and 2002—those years are very important years, because the budgets for our universities and colleges were exactly the same, not adjusted for inflation. Under both parties opposite, we saw no increase. As a matter of fact, we saw half a billion dollars taken out of our college and university systems.

Since 2003, our colleges and universities have seen a 60%, 70%, 80%, 100% increase in their budgets. As a matter of fact, as the member for Whitby–Oshawa would know, the UOIT's budget has gone up 368%. We—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The CCPA report is clear: Ontario's tuition grant only minimally improves affordability, because fees were already so high to begin with. Worse, fewer than one in four students get the grant, and it was paid for by cutting nine grants and bursary programs.

Will the minister finally admit the cost of post-secondary education is out of reach for too many Ontarians, and will he commit to do something about it?

1110

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Ontarians know the difference between the rhetoric of the third party and the reality of the third party. We're going through difficult labour relations across the broader public sector. We have a clear plan that goes a hell of a lot farther with respect to collective bargaining than what they did when they were in government.

We introduced a 30%-off tuition, which is indexed, which is \$1,680. That's \$1,680 more going to families than—the party that in the last election, more recently, didn't even have an education platform. The NDP platform on education was blank—nothing for universities, nothing for colleges, nothing for high schools. Talk about putting students last. That's the party that puts students last.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question this morning is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Over the last several weeks, there have been questions raised in this Legislature regarding access to health care throughout the province and including in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East. In order to ensure that more Ontarians have access to family doctors and family health teams, residents throughout the province deserve answers on how improvements are being made.

Yesterday, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound talked extensively about a very different plan. I worry that that member will not ask the right questions on behalf of his constituents and all Ontarians, so I will. Through you, Speaker, to the minister: What are you doing to make sure that more residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and all of Ontario have access to the health care they need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for that question. I can tell you that making sure Ontar-

ians, no matter where they live in this province, no matter who represents them—the best-quality health care, the best access to health care is a priority for us.

That includes the people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I'm very pleased to report that 95% of the people in that area now have a family doctor. There are now 219 doctors, an increase of 38 doctors—38 more doctors working there now than when we took office. That's an increase of 20% in the number of doctors, even though we have actually seen a decline in population in some areas there. We've also got two new family health teams providing care to 36,000 patients. Over 5,000 of those patients did not have a doctor when the PC Party was in charge.

We will continue to improve access to care for all people, including people in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I heard something that's a little troubling, and I will repeat myself once again to all members: I have a problem with individuals asking questions that talk about somebody else's riding with the intent of embarrassment. I don't like it, and I—

Mr. Steve Clark: I don't like it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time.

I'm asking us to raise, not lower, our decorum in this place. I'm asking us to treat each other with the respect that is deserved, as all members do. I'm going to remind you, I like the idea of asking tough questions, and I like the idea of having answers, but I don't like the idea of moving into somebody else's riding and trying to cause problems. I'm asking you to ensure that it stays that way.

Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. Over the past few months, we've heard from a number of folks on our health care situation—the Drummond report, many people—about the directions of health care, and this does include the role of our local health care organizations. Indeed, we've heard a very different vision yesterday on health care from the opposition party, and one that I believe puts patients at risk and would dismantle oversight that we've worked so hard to put in place.

Residents of Ontario deserve to know if they are being provided quality care by their LHINs and their community care access centres. Through you, Speaker, to the minister: How are Ontario residents benefiting?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me give you just one example of how Ontario residents—in this case, people in the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound area—are benefiting from the good work of our local health integration networks. I am very pleased that, in July, the LHIN listened very carefully to the voice of residents, and they have approved a 10-bed residential hospice. Speaker, this is great news. The community has been fighting for this.

Let me read what Ruth Lovell Stanners, a very powerful former mayor of Owen Sound, a very powerful woman, a spokesman for the residential hospice, said: "It's been very clear to the LHIN that our community is behind this. It's not just the work of a few people; it's the work of the entire two counties. We can all take satisfaction from that."

"LHIN board chair Jeff Low confirmed that community support was the dealbreaker. 'We got the message loud and clear on community support,'" the chair of the LHIN said.

This is the LHIN working. This is the LHIN listening. This is the LHIN acting, responding to the needs of the community. We will all benefit from this hospice.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, you have a full slate of critics. They are called patients and taxpayers. If I doubled the debt, I would expect every person to have a doctor and a health care service that works; 98% is not acceptable.

Specifically, the people of St. Catharines are wondering when their MPP is finally going to stand up and say, "Enough," to the litany of failed Liberal politics. They want to know why the quality of their health care is deteriorating, and their MPP and his Liberal government doesn't care.

The record of the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN, serving Burlington and Norfolk, is dismal, having met only 14% of your own targets. It has missed targets in cancer surgery, cataract surgery, hip replacements, MRI times and ER wait times. Those are the things that patients care about. Apparently, 14% is how the government accepts a high level of success. That's brutal, Minister.

Can the Minister of Health tell the people of St. Catharines why they should close their—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

Let me restate, again, my concern: When we start making comments about other people's ridings, it's not a problem when you're talking about the generics of issues. It becomes apparent that, if it's an attack on an individual member's integrity or their capacity to serve their riding—that's where I'm trying to get you to see that it is not good for all of us.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But we are allowed to do it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would ask that the comments be reserved until at least I'm finished speaking.

So I caution all members again to reserve that kind of discussion and elevate the discussion to issues at hand, as opposed to any one member's ability to serve their community. I reject that they don't.

Minister: Response.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: For just a moment there, I thought the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound was going to say thank you for the decision on the hospice. He knows how much this will benefit his community.

But, Speaker, what I can tell you is that, when the party opposite was in charge, they did not even measure wait times. They did not even have any idea how big the problem was. We came to office. We decided to measure

wait times, and now we are hard at work driving those wait times down.

The member has asked about Niagara. Well, let me tell you about the NHS, Niagara Health System, wait times—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Bill Walker: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm also going to ask the member to bring it down, as he has been mentioned by riding already, and you asked the question.

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker.

The Niagara Health System has had remarkable success in bringing those wait times down. Are we meeting targets? On some, yes. On some, we've still got a way to go. But hip replacements: people are waiting 215 fewer days now to get that hip replaced. They've cut 153 days off knee replacements—

Interjection.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

If the member from Lambton believes that I do not have the resolve to elevate the discussion and to continue to ask us to listen to questions and answers, he's mistaken. I am intent on raising that level, not lowering it, and it's my intent to have us all be able to put questions and have answers in a decorum that's acceptable in this place and anywhere else.

Supplementary question? The member for Elgin-Middlesex-London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, my question is back to the Minister of Health. Minister, the entire Liberal caucus has turned their backs on their constituents over the past nine months. They've been stonewalling investigation attempts into Ornge and their power plays.

Since they refuse to do their jobs and hold you accountable, the PC caucus here is going to do it for you. The LHIN responsible for Richmond Hill met only five of its 14 targets—a 36% success rate. Minister, will you admit that the Central LHIN at Richmond Hill has failed the residents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm just finding this whole line of questioning a bit odd, because they didn't even measure wait times.

We measure wait times, we've set ambitious targets, and we're seeing progress towards those targets. Maybe the member opposite would look in his own backyard and see the progress we've made in London, for example. London Health Sciences has seen a reduction of hip replacements of 262 days—fewer days spent waiting in pain. Knee replacements have come down by 229 days; CTs, 10 days; MRIs, 47 days. We are making progress.

The important thing is, we publicly report. Anybody can see what those wait times are. I want to ask you: Do you support privatization of our health care system? That's the question.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Jonah Schein: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, something fishy is happening in Chatham-Kent-Essex. Residents are on the hook for cleaning up thousands of dead fish from their shores. So far, the Ministry of the Environment is refusing to cast its nets widely, and it's prematurely dismissing this disaster as a natural occurrence.

Will the minister get on board, help with the cleanup and get to the bottom of this before yesterday's catch turns into tomorrow's environmental contamination?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I should say first of all that the member from the area has raised this issue several times with me, and I've communicated with him. The member for Chatham-Kent-Essex, as the local member who is influenced by this and impacted by this, has raised this. So I want to give him his credit for doing so. He did not make outlandish charges such as you're making at the present time for what some might think are political reasons.

The Ministry of the Environment has been doing testing of the fish in this particular case to try to determine the source of what has happened. Very often, what happens, happens on a natural basis; that is, the bottom water comes up to the top, the top water goes down to the bottom.

But that doesn't mean that the Ministry of the Environment or the federal Ministry of the Environment or the Ministry of Natural Resources have come to a final conclusion on what the case may be. As soon as we have—and we've established this as a high priority—the results of that testing, we'll be sharing it with everybody.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Back to the Minister of the Environment: Rather than helping the residents of Chatham-Kent-Essex deal with this serious environmental contamination issue that has the potential to impact the health of people, the Ministry of the Environment, a ministry that's undermined by deep budget cuts, seems to have hung a "Gone fishing" sign on their door.

People are holding their noses and combing their beaches with garbage bags in hand. When will the minister stop floundering around and reel in the situation before it gets away from him?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Whoever wrote that question for you has some amusing comments to use.

I have a note here. As you would know and the local member would know, there were public meetings held over the weekend. You probably didn't have a chance to attend those and were relying on some political staffers to give you the questions. But I suggest that you speak to the local member, who has been on top of the issue, along with the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Natural Resources, and working hard to determine, first of all, the source, and to assist in the cleanup.

Even the mayor of Chatham-Kent, who is a former NDP member of this Legislature, has been complimentary of the manner in which this government has handled

this situation. But I know that for political reasons sometimes it's much more fun to try to exploit a situation of this kind instead of dealing with it responsibly.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. David Zimmer: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, over the past few years, the government's long-term energy plan has outlined a bold plan for a clean, reliable energy system. Its focus is on the health of families. It focuses on a clean environment. It creates jobs and brings investment, and it reduces reliance on fossil fuels.

Minister, last week the federal government, the federal Tories, brought forward their emission standards for coal plants, to be implemented over the next number of decades—decades. Although this is a step in the right direction, it's unlike our government's plan, which is committed to eliminate the use of coal by 2014. That's two years from now, not decades down the road. It's a decision that makes Ontario a leader in this field.

Minister, adding clean, reliable energy and replacing dirty coal is a costly endeavour—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member is absolutely right: We need to get out of coal as quickly as possible to protect the health of Ontarians and to save money.

The member from Willowdale has quite rightly said that federal regulations that look decades down the road aren't helping the health of Ontario families today. We're out of it by the end of 2014. We're going to prevent hundreds of thousands of illnesses that were taking place in 2003, when coal was a quarter of our power use. We're saving over \$4 billion a year that was paid through the health system to deal with those illnesses. We're not having to spend for the environmental degradation.

Getting out of coal makes a lot of sense, is the right thing to do, and we're doing it by the end of 2014, not several decades down the road.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, there has been a lot of discussion regarding the benefits of the feed-in-tariff program for our energy sector and how it helps Ontario families and businesses. These discussions talk about jobs, investments, new factories, innovation and much more.

The opposition over there is deadily opposed to the FIT program and would much rather see the continuation of coal-fired plants in this province, sort of like their federal Conservative cousins. But my constituents in Willowdale tell me that the FIT program has been a great addition to the clean economy. Indeed, other jurisdictions are following our lead; they see the benefit.

Minister, can you give me an update on the status of the FIT program and the benefits that it's bringing to our energy sector and to Ontario families?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member from Willowdale is quite right. We are using clean, green, renew-

able energy, whether it's solar, biogas, wind or hydro to get out, and accelerate our getting out, of coal, but also doing it in a way that establishes jobs here in the province of Ontario. We're well over 20,000 jobs already. We've got a number of manufacturing facilities. We're bringing this on and requiring that at least half of the components—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Simply putting your hand over your face while you heckle does not stop the noise.

Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know some don't want to know the relationship between clean and green and jobs, but you know that the blade plant in Tillsonburg makes blades for wind turbines. If you kill the wind turbines, you don't need the blades and you don't need the jobs.

The frame plant, Thurston in manufacturing in Port Colborne, makes frames for wind turbines. If you kill the turbines, you don't need the frames; you kill the jobs.

We're bringing on clean, green electricity in a way that creates jobs here in Ontario. Jobs are important for families and businesses.

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LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is for the Minister of Health this morning. It's evident that the member from Ottawa-Orléans is preoccupied with conceiving and dreaming up a carbon tax and not interested in passing along the report card to residents from his LHIN—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are some things that are not in rules and in regulations. There are some things that are written, and in this place we speak about treating each other with respect. If I've opened a can of worms, my deepest apologies. I'm asking us to race to the top, not to the bottom.

The member proceed.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This all started with the Minister of Health this morning. I'd just like to point that out. I hope she has an answer for this question.

The Champlain LHIN met—wait for it—two of 14 of its targets—14%. That may be a passing grade on that side of that House. It certainly isn't a passing grade on this side of the House. So I ask the minister: Will she admit defeat and will she tell the people of Ottawa-Orléans that their LHIN and their MPP continue to fail them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yesterday we were presented with a white paper from the caucus opposite. It contained what I had hoped was a simple editing error. After this morning's question period, I am now convinced that the health care policy of the party opposite is to privatize health care.

I'm asking the member opposite: Are you with Frank Klees, the member from Newmarket–Aurora, are you with Shaun Francis, or are you going to stand up for publicly funded health care?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary, the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Health. At least one Liberal member has been busy breaking with the Premier on his decision to eliminate 60,000 jobs in the horse racing industry.

Health care in Peterborough, in Ontario, continues to deteriorate. The LHIN responsible for Peterborough met four of its 13 objectives, a success rate of 30%—quite pathetic. The wait time for admission to hospital in Peterborough is 44 hours, which is eight hours longer than the target.

Will the Minister of Health admit that the LHINs are actual failures and embrace the PC plan to strengthen Ontario's health care system—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Peterborough will come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When the Progressive Conservative Party was responsible for health care in this province, 28,000 people in Peterborough could not get a family doctor. That's a fact. When the Progressive Conservative Party was in power, they shut down hospitals. They fired thousands of nurses. Doctors left Ontario for the States—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And while I have the clock stopped, I want to bring one more point of clarity. When individuals are being attacked for the work they do, this is what is bothering me. I do not have a problem with people talking about ridings per se, in issues involved in ridings; I have a problem with individuals attacking other individuals in their ridings, and the work they do. So please, all I'm asking you is to not engage in that activity.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham has been talked to before, and I would like the member from Durham to stop his insistence on making comment after I'm speaking.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am hopeful that the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock, being a nurse herself, will stand up and say, "I reject privatized health care. I am going to stand up for not-for-profit hospitals in this province. I reject the platform to move to private health care." Will the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock, a nurse, stand up in favour—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

YOUTH SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The government has announced its plans to close the Thistleton Regional Centre, a renowned facility that serves the needs of some of Ontario's most challenged citizens. One of the internationally acclaimed programs provided by Thistleton is the sexual abuse family education and treatment program, or SAFE-T. It provides life-saving help to children and parents who come there following a sexual assault within their family.

Will the minister explain how he thinks it is possible to maintain this outstanding program through the closures?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank the member opposite for the question. I want to say that after making the difficult decision to close Thistleton—by the way, a decision that was made by the NDP government as well, in the 1990s—that we are well on our way to successfully transferring programs from Thistleton into the community, including the important programs referenced by the member opposite, the great work that's being done by the programs of SAFE-T, TRE-ADD and Panorama.

I want to assure the member opposite that the important services that are offered and provided to families in these programs will continue to be offered through community-based agencies.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Just for the record, we reversed that decision. That's why it's still open today.

The minister recently released the action plan for youth, which details 20 recommendations for strengthening supports for youth. SAFE-T is an essential program needing this support. Experts like Professor Marshall, from Queen's University, have written to you, saying, "I'm surprised that your ministry intends to close any programs for juvenile offenders at a time when the evidence clearly indicates that such programs not only markedly reduce re-offence rates but also assist these young people to become productive citizens." In light of all of this, how does the minister justify his position?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would just repeat what I had said previously—the member opposite perhaps can't take yes as an answer—that I'm assuring the member opposite that the programs she is referencing and is concerned about, that provide this expert service—the important services provided to these families in these programs will continue to be offered through community-based agencies.

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We are well on our way to moving through a two-year process for closing Thistleton and transferring the important programs that are provided there to community agencies, which I know the member opposite would agree have the capacity of providing great services within

the communities. In most cases, in fact, for the individuals involved and the families, the services will be provided in a seamless fashion and closer to their homes. So, Mr. Speaker, my ministry is working closely to make sure that this transition proceeds smoothly.

ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Speaker. And I will respect your earlier request and use the term “official opposition” when I refer to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

My question is to the Minister of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, no. Stop the clock.

A lot of people are in this place. This is more about ensuring that we elevate the discussion without bringing reference to what I’m asking you not to do. What you should not be doing at the side should not be done actually. So let’s just relax here.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Over the past couple of weeks, I had the opportunity to sit on the Standing Committee on Estimates, and the minister went into great detail in discussing the issues around the Algonquin land claim. This is a very important discussion for us, as members of the committee. We learned quite a bit. But there were some inaccurate statements that have come out as of late, and recently there was a press release from a member of the official opposition that indicated that there were no public consultations going on until an agreement in principle was signed.

I’m just asking if the minister could please clear up this confusion and tell us exactly what consultations have actually taken place with the agreement in principle, which has yet to be signed.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’m very pleased to be able to talk about the progress that has been made on the Algonquin land claim and to clear up some of this confusion about who has been consulted and so on.

The negotiating parties are not waiting to consult until the agreement in principle is signed. The formal signatures on the AIP, or the agreement in principle, would only occur after all three parties have ratified it, and that’s not likely to happen until late next year, Mr. Speaker. So the parties—Canada, Ontario and the Algonquins—are clearly not waiting for those signatures before consulting.

There has been input from various advisory groups. There are two advisory groups, one a municipal advisory committee, and a committee of external advisers, both of which have over 30 members on them, and there have been many meetings with those groups. Since 1996, there have been conversations with the community. Since early

May of this year, the Ontario negotiation team has had more than 40 meetings.

So the ongoing consultation process will continue, but there will also be consultation with the public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for once again confirming that our government is committed to the consultation process, because this is an important issue in eastern Ontario and particularly in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Further to some of the questions raised during the committee process, there was a suggestion that there is much secrecy surrounding this claim. Aside from the consultations that the minister just spoke about, what more are we doing, as a government, to ensure that all three negotiating parties are as open and as transparent about the process as possible?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell is very interested in stability in eastern Ontario and some clarity around these issues.

In order to protect the integrity of any negotiation process, there are some elements that need to remain confidential. So, out of respect for the large variety of interests in a highly populated region, all three negotiating parties have agreed to keep some pieces of information confidential.

Last week, the Ontario negotiator reached out to local MPPs he met with in the spring to provide them with a further update at the negotiating table. I understand that an update from the negotiators outlining some of the elements of the draft agreement in principle will be provided to the public in coming days. So, very soon, there will be more information available.

Algonquin Park, for example, will remain a public park for the enjoyment of all. No private property will be expropriated.

Those are issues that are a concern, and they need to be—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order, please.

New question.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Instead of working hard to improve the quality of health care that constituents receive, the Liberal government has focused on cancelling gas plants in Oakville. Instead of advocating for better health care, the Liberal government is busy justifying the saddling of taxpayers with a fee of at least \$300 million to save political skin, like in Oakville. And since many of the Liberal government are probably unaware, I would like to inform them

of the health care Oakville constituents have received under the Liberal LHINs.

Residents in Oakville wait 156 days for cataract surgery, 59 days longer than the LHIN's target. Seniors wait 144 days for hip replacement surgery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: The LHIN has only met six of its 14 targets. Could the Minister of Health tell the people of Oakville whether she believes—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson:—that a 43% success rate is acceptable, or is it more acceptable to save seats—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First of all, I'm delighted that the PC Party is finally focusing on health care. It's great to hear that.

Speaker, our results speak for ourselves. Let me just review how we are doing when it comes to meeting wait times: 96% of cataract surgeries are meeting the target; 90% of hip replacements are meeting the target; 83% of knee replacements are meeting the target; 45% of MRIs—we know we've got work to do there, and we're doing it; 87% of CT scans; 93% of pediatric surgeries; and 97% of general surgeries.

Now, the member opposite may want to point at—they can play fun with statistics if they want, Speaker, but these facts speak for themselves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary, the member from Barrie.

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is also for the Minister of Health. The member from Niagara Falls has been busy, except he hasn't been busy fighting for better health care for his constituents. He's been busy protesting his own government. He's been busy justifying the loss of thousands of jobs in his riding. And the quality of health care in Niagara Falls continues its downward spiral.

Can the minister please explain why Niagara LHIN has a 14% success rate and whether she believes that the LHIN is performing well and if this meets her so-called ambitious target for Niagara LHIN?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This is the moment that I was using—I guess you would call this a “teachable moment.” Without the comments about the individual member, it would have been a very legitimate question to ask. I was concerned about bringing the member's abilities or whatever, not to be mentioned.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, once again let's talk about our record, how far we've come since 2005 when we instituted our wait time strategy.

Cancer surgery is down 35%. Waits for angiography are down 59%; angioplasty, down 46%; bypass surgery, down 14%. For cataract surgery, we've met our target; we've cut it by 60%. Hip replacement, 162 days down; knee replacement is down by 213 days; CT scan waits are down by 44%; MRI scans are down by 34 days.

Speaker, we will not take lessons on how to run a health care system from the party that drove up wait times, that did not provide adequate primary care. We are making—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

MINISTER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Frank Klees: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Thank you. Speaker. With your permission, I would like to take advantage of a teachable moment as well, and it relates to standing order 23(i), which reads as follows:

“In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she....”

“(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another member....”

The Minister of Health, on two occasions in responding to questions today, referred to me by name and impugned false motive.

I would like to ask this question, Speaker: Given your concern about raising the bar here, why did you not call her to order when she did that?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order. I want to make it clear that some of the discussion that took place today is probably the very reason for what gave rise to my concern that I have been asking the members to pay particular attention to, in terms of individuals and their comments. This goes back to my original discussion about how, when mentioning people, you should be mentioning either their title or their riding, because if you don't do that, what tends to happen is it becomes personal, and then that elevates the anger side and the personal side of it, as opposed to the issue at hand, in terms of responding.

I made every effort today to try to elevate that debate. I thank the member and I understand his point. I would ask that all members—anyone who wants to correct their record when they make these kinds of situations happen—stand and correct their record. That's what I am going to be referring to, and I thank the member for bringing that to my attention.

VISITOR

Hon. Brad Duguid: Point of order?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's nothing about this; I just want to introduce Steve Del Duca, who I believe is the member-elect now for the riding of Vaughan, in the east gallery.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from London–Fanshawe has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her

question given by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities concerning post-secondary education. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLÈVES

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Projet de loi 115, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1153 to 1158.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, take your seats, please.

On September 10, Ms. Broten moved third reading of Bill 115.

All those in favour, stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Balkissoon, Bas
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hoskins, Eric
Hudak, Tim
Jackson, Rod
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Leone, Rob
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McDonnell, Jim
McGuinly, Dalton
McKenna, Jane
McMeekin, Ted
McNaughton, Monte
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm

Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza
Munro, Julia
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Oraziotti, David
Pettapiece, Randy
Piruzza, Teresa
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles
Takhari, Harinder S.
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff
Zimmer, David

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bisson, Gillies
Campbell, Sarah
DiNovo, Cheri
Gélinas, France
Horwath, Andrea
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
Miller, Paul
Natyshak, Taras
Schein, Jonah
Singh, Jagmeet
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, stand one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 82; the nays are 15.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1203 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'd like to introduce some fabulous people from my riding and from resisters.ca: Kimberly Rivera, Alex Lisman, Ken Marciniac and Michelle Robidoux. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Ted Arnott: As I begin my 23rd year of service in this House, I want to thank my constituents for granting me the privilege of speaking on their behalf in this place.

I return to an issue I've raised many times: the need for a bypass around the community of Morriston in Puslinch township, south of Guelph. This project would realign Highway 6 south of the 401, bypassing the congested two-lane section through Morriston. This portion of Highway 6 is currently a bottleneck, with traffic jams that often stretch for several kilometres. Highway 6 serves as an important economic corridor, linking the 401 to the Hamilton and Niagara regions as well as to the US border. It is vital to the economy of a large portion of southern Ontario.

On May 29, Mayor Dennis Lever, other municipal representatives and I met with the Minister of Transportation in his office. Working together, we followed up yet again on this vital project, asking when the project will be placed on the ministry's five-year construction plan.

This traffic jam in Morriston happens to be in my riding, but the congestion impacts many other ridings as well. I am soon going to be writing my neighbouring colleagues in the House to ask for their support, as the project will benefit their ridings just as much as it will benefit our area. We are also working with others who have an interest in this project, to get them to speak up.

The environmental assessment has been done. Property acquisition needs to be accelerated. The government plans to spend \$2.4 billion on highway infrastructure this year. We need our fair share, and we need to know when we're going to be on the ministry's five-year plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I personally offer the member happy anniversary, and congratulations on your years of service—

Interjection: Last week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):—last week.

WES PRANKARD

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to recognize a fine young man from my riding of Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake: 14-year-old Wes Prankard. Wes's goal is to bring equality for First Nations children in health, education and play. Wes completed the playground for—

Mr. John Yakabuski: You must have been writing that statement during the vote, Kim.

Mr. Kim Craiton: Excuse me?

Wes completed the playground for Attawapiskat last year on his 13th birthday. He told many people that the smiling faces of parents and the laughter of children made his 13th birthday the most memorable, raising over \$100,000 to complete the playground.

Recently, with the help of his family and the community, Wes delivered more than one million pennies to the Toronto Dominion Bank at Lundy's Lane in Niagara Falls—\$13,518, to be exact. This money will purchase a new playground for the impoverished community of Kashechewan First Nation, a reserve near James Bay struggling with poverty and depression. Earlier this year, Wes completed a three-week camp-out at Campark Resorts on Lundy's Lane, urging kids across Canada to hold simultaneous camp-outs.

Wes is just a kid who wants to help others. His target is 20 playgrounds and two foster homes, which will require 1.5 billion pennies.

Congratulations to Wes Prankard, his family and his community for their continued contributions to the piles of pennies for the playground. Thank you, Wes.

BLYTH THRESHERS' REUNION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I am pleased to rise today to recognize the Blyth Threshers' Reunion. On this past weekend, the Huron Pioneer Thresher and Hobby Association celebrated their 51st anniversary. During that anniversary, the small town of Blyth, located in the centre of Huron-Bruce, saw its population grow immensely as the 800-capacity trailer park was filled—filled to capacity, I'm proud to say. During this weekend festival, community spirit and old-fashioned farming techniques and pioneer life were celebrated.

There's something for everybody, for all ages, at the Blyth Threshers' Reunion, from threshing demonstrations, to kid and adult tractor pulls, to a horse exhibit and demonstration, sheep shearing, birds of flight exhibits and the talented Teeswater pipe band. It's a weekend not to be missed by anyone, either the residents of Blyth or anyone who comes to visit.

On the Friday, the threshers hold a school day, an important opportunity for those studying pioneer life as part of their curriculum, to see first-hand many of the tools and early machines used by our ancestors. Students were able to meet people and ask questions of those who have an interest in preserving history by collecting, restoring or building models of this early equipment. They also host a craft show by local exhibitors, with all handmade items, and they have a lot of entertainment, as I mentioned.

I want to thank the organizers of Blyth Threshers' Reunion, and to the volunteers, a great job done. I wish the organization continued success for many, many years.

KIMBERLY RIVERA

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I would like to introduce the House to Kimberly Rivera, a wonderful community member and mother of four in Parkdale-High Park. She and her family have lived in Canada since 2007. Two of her children were born here. She's a devoted mother, takes part in school activities and also is active in the community breakfast programs, among other things.

The government of Canada is trying to deport Kimberly and her family, and if they succeed, Kimberly faces possible imprisonment as a conscientious objector. My husband, and the father of my children, was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War. He died in the 1990s. But she and he continue an amazing tradition of Canada welcoming those who are resisting foreign wars, right from the United Empire Loyalists to today.

I would ask everyone here to contact Jason Kenney, the honourable Minister of Immigration in Ottawa, and to demand that Kenney allow Kimberly and her family to stay in Canada, because, after all, we are a compassionate and humanitarian country.

I ask all members here to write and to check resistors.ca, to make sure that Kenney knows that people like Kimberly and her children should be allowed to stay in a place that values and loves them. Thank you, Kimberly.

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm here to talk about an extraordinary event that's going on in the great city of Toronto right now as we speak, and that's the Toronto International Film Festival, TIFF. We tend to forget that not only does TIFF bring about \$200-million worth of economic activity into the greater Toronto area, but it also employs thousands of people in all aspects of filmmaking and film production. It is one of the third- or fourth-largest employers, in fact, in Toronto in television, film and theatre production. This is an incredible investment in the arts.

The best filmmakers from the whole world are here. Actors, producers, writers—they're all here in Toronto for this film festival, which is really second to none.

There's no better film festival than the Toronto film festival in the whole world. We should be proud of what our Canadians have produced. We should be supporting Canadian film, Canadian television, and these are Canadian jobs.

I support this incredible venture. Our government has been investing with grants and with tax credits in the Ontario film industry, and it is well worth participating in, so if you are in Toronto over the next two weeks, do the Canadian thing: Go see a Canadian film or at least a foreign film at TIFF. Forget about watching football on TV; go see a movie tonight.

CASINOS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Once again communities across Ontario are being divided by the prospect of up to 29 new casinos to be built by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. The government prefers to spend more money on this and put up to 60,000 more people out of work in this province by killing the slots-at-racetracks partnership and Ontario's horse racing along with it.

Communities in my riding are speaking out on the prospect of a casino in the city of North Bay. The township of Chisholm is one of many area communities who wrote to me who have passed resolutions on this issue, and I promised to read them—"the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately pass Bill 76, the Ensuring Local Voices in New Casino Gambling Development Act, to help ensure that local voices are respected prior to the development of any new casino."

Speaker, my party and I firmly believe a referendum must be held in each and every community in this province where a casino is proposed to be built. With the potential social implications, this needs to be a community decision, not a government decision.

Furthermore, with respect to casinos for economic development, I pose a question: Is that the best we can do?

NORTHERN ONTARIO INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Sarah Campbell: As I'm sure everyone is aware, many northern communities were hit hard by the downturn in the forest sector and then the global recession that followed. This led many in our region to leave the province to find jobs in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Fortunately, there's good news on the horizon: Communities like Ignace and Emo are preparing for new prosperity as a result of forestry and mining opportunities that are set to bring hundreds of jobs to their communities within the next few years.

While this is great news, both communities have populations of less than 1,500 people, giving them limited resources to build the infrastructure that's necessary to meet the new demands that will come as a result of their rise in population. For instance, both commu-

nities have waste water treatment plants that are currently at capacity, and the current tax base is simply not large enough to finance new plants that can handle a population increase of 10%, 20% or even 30%.

While I am pleased to hear that the province has announced the \$60-million fund for municipal infrastructure, and I'm hopeful that both communities will be successful in obtaining funding from this fund, more needs to be done. The situation in both communities shows why we need to develop a permanent funding model for municipal infrastructure to allow our smaller municipalities to develop long-term strategies to keep up with future economic growth.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise today to bring to the House's attention comments made in this Legislature yesterday during debate on Bill 50. The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry made the following statement: "As one of my colleagues was saying, it's 73 years ago today that Canada declared war on another tyrant, and that's what we're seeing here. The people of Nazi Germany didn't know what was going on, and over my time here I find it hard to believe how hard it is to find out what's going on and how easy it is for the government to hide things."

Comparing Ontario's government to the Nazi regime, which unleashed a wave of terror in one of the most tragic episodes in human history, is despicable and totally unacceptable. There is no place in this Legislature and no place in Ontario for allegations of racism, hatred and prejudice of the kind that characterized Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime. Such a comparison is outrageous and insulting to all Ontarians.

The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry should do the honourable thing and apologize in this House for these deplorable comments, and his leader should do so as well.

ANNIVERSARY OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Mr. John Yakabuski: As all members of this House know, today marks the 11th anniversary of the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. These were heinous acts committed out of a hatred that resulted in the deaths of nearly 3,000 innocent people. More than 90 countries lost citizens that day, including 24 Canadians. In the rescue efforts that followed, 343 firefighters and 60 police officers also lost their lives.

We should all take pause today to remember the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as well as the families who lost their loved ones. Many more people lost their colleagues, neighbours and friends. Today, we mourn them all.

We must never forget that the terrorist acts that day were an attack against the freedoms that all of us hold dear, by fanatical people who will stop at nothing to impose their warped beliefs on the rest of the world.

Terrorism is still a real threat, and while 11 years have passed, there are still those out there who live to destroy our western democracies and all that they stand for.

I am sure I speak for everyone when I say that I will never forget where I was and what I was doing when I first heard of those attacks on that fateful morning. I can remember the feeling of complete shock and disbelief by what unfolded before my eyes and the anger and sadness I felt as I realized what had happened.

Looking back, what we should remember from the terrible events of that day is our shared humanity. The international community responded with expressions of solidarity, mourning and pledges of support. This Legislature joined together to pass a motion pledging the resources of Ontario to assist in dealing with the aftermath. Strangers helped strangers, united in their compassion for the victims. First responders suspended concern for their own safety, caring only for others.

The victims and the first responders who lost their lives will never be forgotten. They will be forever remembered in our thoughts and prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Schein assumes ballot item number 66, Ms. Campbell assumes ballot item number 79, Mr. Harris assumes ballot item number 55, Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item number 65 and Mr. Walker assumes ballot item number 80.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment is seeking unanimous consent. Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 55 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much. I appreciate that the member said, when seeking unanimous consent, what it was about, but it would be very helpful for the government in those cases to give the House leaders an advance copy of what the unanimous consent motion is

about so we've had a chance to read it and check it and so that we don't get ourselves into any trouble.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is not a point of order. However, the point has been made, and I would suggest respectfully that the House leaders decide on how that's going to transpire in the future. Thank you very much.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I am pleased to rise in the House today to inform members that Ontario is experiencing unprecedented levels of mineral development activity that is promoting economic activity and job creation that will benefit all Ontarians for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is blessed with an abundance of natural resources at a time when the world is developing faster than ever and demanding these resources. Moreover, our government has worked diligently to create a superior investment climate with our mineral development strategy, a climate that is promoting mineral development. This, coupled with our competitive tax regime, makes Ontario a prime jurisdiction for business and job creation.

Ontario's advantages appeal to mineral developers. That is evident in the new levels of exploration activity we have been experiencing throughout the province in recent years. Mr. Speaker, Ontario is a hotbed of mineral development. For the first time, there are more than 600 active mining exploration projects across the province. Another record was established when exploration spending exceeded \$1 billion in 2011, more than any other jurisdiction in Canada, ever. Mining claim activity in Ontario remains well above historical levels, and the number of active mining claim units rose 5%, to 326,000 in 2011 from 312,000 in 2010.

1520

Over the last 10 years, more new mines opened here than anywhere else in Canada. That tells us that investing in the exploration and development of minerals in Ontario pays off.

Studies have shown that a single mine can have an enormous economic impact on a community and its economy. Research indicates that the 480 direct mining jobs at a single mine can create 2,280 additional jobs, with well over half of those being filled by local residents. It also points out that an average mine contributes \$278 million to the country's gross domestic product, \$220 million of which remains local.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is, without question, Canada's premier mining jurisdiction. We rank among the top 10 world producers of platinum, nickel and cobalt, and we are significant producers of gold, silver, copper and zinc. We are also in the select group of jurisdictions that produce, process and market diamonds.

Ontario's mining industry is valued at more than \$10 billion, and it creates over 27,000 direct and 50,000 indirect jobs in the province.

Our government intends to build on this success. With this in mind, we have committed to assisting the industry in opening at least eight new mines over the course of the next 10 years. Two of these mines have already opened this year: Lake Shore Gold's Bell Creek gold mine and AuRico Gold's Young-Davidson mine.

Interjections.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We won't close mines like the NDP did, who are now heckling mineral development.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now I'll ask you to come to order.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that there are more than a dozen projects in northern Ontario on the verge of becoming operating mines over the next few years. I am referring to projects like Rubicon's Phoenix Gold project near Red Lake and the Detour Lake operation near Cochrane, which will become Canada's largest gold mine.

Of course we're all looking forward to the development of the Ring of Fire region, which could become Canada's first world-class chromite deposit. Earlier this year, Cliffs resources announced it is building a new \$1.85-billion ferrochrome processing facility in northern Ontario after months of stiff competition from other jurisdictions, including Quebec. Mr. Speaker, this means about 900 direct new jobs are coming to the Sudbury area, 450 during construction, and up to 450 during production.

It's important to note also that the mine and mill development in the Far North will create as many as 700 direct jobs over and above the mining supply and services jobs and the induced jobs the Cliffs chromite mine will create in northwestern Ontario and elsewhere across the north and beyond. We can also look forward to other companies, like Noront Resources, mining in the Ring of Fire, creating hundreds of new jobs.

More importantly, we are approaching the development of the Ring of Fire and the massive opportunity it provides in a responsible, inclusive manner. We are ensuring that we are environmentally responsible. We are ensuring that we meet our duty to consult with the appropriate First Nations communities. We are ensuring that any undertaking must bring long-term prosperity to these communities through appropriate engagement and resources.

These are very exciting times in Ontario's mineral development community. The future prosperity of our province is being staked today by the men and women working to develop our mineral wealth for the jobs of tomorrow. We certainly look forward to the opportunity, economic development and job creation that mining will bring to northern Ontario and indeed the entire province. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): He's finished. You can stop. Thank you.

Responses? The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Certainly, I share the minister's enthusiasm for mining in the province of Ontario. I may disagree with some of the points he made, however, because I looked at the most recent standings for places to invest in mining—where the most attractive jurisdiction for mineral exploration and development in the world is. From this year's survey of mining companies, I don't see Ontario on the list. In fact, I have to go to the bottom of the page to see Ontario mentioned. The number one jurisdiction to invest is New Brunswick.

"New Brunswick shot to the top of the rankings as miners lauded the province for its fair, transparent and efficient legal system and consistency in the enforcement and interpretation of existing environmental regulations...."

"Combine that with a competitive taxation regime and minimal uncertainty around disputed land claims"—that's why New Brunswick is rated number one. I look to the bottom of the page, and there's Ontario: 13th, Minister. So we're not number one.

Back when Tim Hudak was Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Ontario was rated the number one jurisdiction in the world to invest in mining. Ontario PCs, unlike the McGuinty government, recognized just how important mining is. That's why I had a private member's bill to do away with the Far North Act. The Liberal government brought in the Far North Act. That would take 225,000 square kilometres of northern Ontario off the map, so to speak, for mining development; 225,000 square kilometres. Who knows how many Rings of Fire are in that 225,000 square kilometres?

I would say that there's a lot of uncertainty out there in the mining sector in Ontario right now. You just need to look at the way they've handled the Ring of Fire, something they like to talk a lot about, when they made a deal with one company without discussing with many of the other companies involved, and what do we have? We have First Nations, who have such a vested interest in this. We have Aroland First Nation coming out very much against it. We have Chief Peter Moonias from Neskantaga saying in a press release, "We will continue to fight" the Ring of Fire despite the court ruling, and he's committed to laying down his life if the bridge goes across the Attawapiskat River.

I wouldn't say that's all rosy, Mr. Minister; I would say that that shows that the province has failed in its duty to consult. If you're trying to do business in this province, you'd think that that's a fairly basic building block—that you want to do some consulting with the First Nations who are very much involved in the Ring of Fire, which I do agree has great potential for jobs for northerners, and it has great potential for First Nations to participate in the jobs. I see it as being a great opportunity, but the province needs to do a better job in its duty

to consult. It's not the company's duty to consult; it's the province's duty to consult. The province needs to do a better job of providing education opportunities for First Nations so they can fully participate in these new mines, and it hasn't been doing a great job of that. What we do have is a lot of uncertainty there.

In my last minute, if I may, I would certainly like to bring up some local issues. I have not too many mines in the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka but I do have a graphite mine that's trying to get operating. It was an existing graphite mine. The prices are quite high for graphite. The Kearney graphite mine: I went for a tour of it a couple of weeks ago. They don't invite me for a tour unless they have problems, it seems, these days. I was there because they're really concerned about getting the mine operating. They're running into red tape and stumbling blocks with the McGuinty government, and they're really trying to get—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Wrong again.

Mr. Norm Miller: They're trying to get operating, Minister. I wish you'd look into it. They're trying to get operating by January. It's 80 local jobs. It's very important to the area, and many more spin-off jobs. So I really wish you would help. I know that the member for Nipissing-Pembroke has a graphite mine as well: Bissett Creek graphite mine. It's also running into red tape and problems, and they're trying to get up and operating.

1530

I simply say that we can do a lot better job. I'm sure the NDP critic will bring up some of the lost jobs in the Timmins area, like Xstrata, which just moved 700 jobs to Quebec because of Ontario's high energy prices. We can do a lot better in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's my opportunity to respond to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and some of the information he has brought forward in his statement.

But first, I just thought I'd share with the House that one of the biggest duties that I had when I was a newly elected member was to really find out what was going on in Algoma-Manitoulin. Being predominantly with a lot of seniors, I thought it was important that my first task was to go out and deal with the health care sector and find out what was going on, what was the state of it.

My next priority was really, as the critic for northern development and mines, to actually go out and visit miners: go out to the sites, speak to the individuals, go down in the shafts, talk to the guys on the jackleg, speak to management and really engage in regards to where they see this industry going. Where do they see the challenges are, and how are things going forward? I have to say I was successful in doing that.

With everything that has happened in my riding over the course of the summer, that was one of my biggest priorities, to reach out to industry, to find out exactly what is happening. How are things for them? Overwhelmingly, the surprise that I got from industry is, "What the hell are you doing here?"—oh, I'm sorry—"What are you doing here?" They've never had that

opportunity to really engage with the role of what a critic does, and why it is important—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thanks, Mike.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Well, I'm sorry, I don't—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'll let these gentlemen go on.

Anyway, it was in new mines, not where my colleague from Timmins-James Bay went to. These were other mines in which he didn't have that opportunity. Obviously, it had been mines where they haven't had the opportunity to speak to the minister about where they were going.

There was one thing that the minister opened up with: Ontario is experiencing unprecedented levels of mineral development activities. Well, he's absolutely right about that, but it's not in whole, or in its entirety, due to changes or actions that this government has been doing. You have to really look at where the price of the commodity has gone, and right now a lot of the industry is basing their future projects based on the price of commodities. They're moving forward with it, and that's a lot of the reason why they're moving ahead.

In my discussions that I've had with the First Nations, with industry and with those individuals, a lot of the problems that they've had in the industry is the lack of trades, the lack of individuals that will be able to come in and build the future for this industry—the lack of training, the lack of having manpower coming in. So we really need to look and get not only industry but this government on board, and all of our First Nations partners in this. We need to get them at the table prior to any announcements that are happening, because they need to build their own capacity as to how they are going to benefit in the long term. They deserve the opportunities to build their capacity as to where they're going and how they're going to secure their future in this process.

Face facts: If we don't have our First Nations partners with us at the table, which has happened with the Ring of Fire right now, we're going to have a lot of problems. We're going to be faced with a lot of challenges, and this prosperity that this government is boasting about—we're going to be challenged to get to that day. We're going to have some difficulties in reaching it.

We can talk about having these plants that are going to be developed, this refinery that's going to go in Nickel Belt. But if we don't address the question of how we are going to provide the power, or how we are going to address the question of how this company or this industry is going to be able to afford to pay these high hydro costs, we won't be able to move forward anywhere. And we're going to be back to square one, where we're going to be asking the question, why are we permitting some of our resources here in Ontario to be exported outside of Ontario, taking away our jobs, taking away our prosperity, taking away First Nation opportunities? So it's nice to see that the industry is growing and it is moving forward, but if we don't get it right, right off the bat, right at the beginning, we are putting ourselves behind the

eight ball, and we're just creating walls where there are no walls to be built, where we have the opportunity and one of the richest provinces with the resources that we have.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the late show requested by the member from Leeds–Grenville has been withdrawn.

It is now time for petitions. The member from Durham.

PETITIONS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to represent my constituents in the riding of Durham. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

"Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals"—shameful;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments and that a moratorium on wind development be declared until an independent, epidemiological study is completed into the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Ethan.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas it is the right of every Canadian to vote once in each election for the candidate of his or her choice and have their vote fairly counted and not offset by faulty voter registration or any sort of illegal practices; and

"Whereas credible allegations of voting irregularities exist for the most recent election, including non-citizens voting, persons voting multiple times at various voting stations and errors on the permanent register of electors list; and

"Whereas the practice of 'vouching' has been practised in polling stations where it is not permitted, such as non-rural polling stations, and does not require verified proof of a person's age, citizenship and residence in a riding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support Bill 106, Prevention of Electoral Fraud Act, 2012, by Bas Balkissoon, the member for Scarborough–Rouge River, that would require that voters

present proof of Canadian citizenship; require the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario to appoint an independent party to conduct a review of the permanent register of electors within six months after the bill passes and subsequently every five years; allow scrutineers to monitor the process by which voters add their names to the voters' list on election day; and forbid vouching, which currently excludes the requirement for legitimate identification."

Mr. Speaker, I support this petition. I'll sign it and I'll have it sent to the table by page Leo.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Mr. Todd Smith: This is presented on behalf of seniors.

"Whereas the United Senior Citizens of Ontario has expressed its concerns over the high costs of parking at hospitals in Ontario on behalf of its more than 300,000 members; and

"Whereas thousands of Ontario seniors find it difficult to live on their fixed income and cannot afford these extra hospital parking fees added to their daily living costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association Journal has said in an editorial that parking fees are a barrier to health care and add additional stress to patients who have enough to deal with;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Ontario's members of provincial Parliament and the Dalton McGuinty government take action to abolish parking fees for all seniors when visiting hospitals."

I agree with this petition and will hand it to the table with Zakhar.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario is near the bottom of the country—we are eighth of 10 provinces—in health funding per person; and

"Whereas Ontario has the fewest hospital beds per person of any province in Canada. Since the 1990s, the Ontario government has cut and closed 18,500 hospital beds, resulting in overcrowding, bed shortages and backlogged emergency departments. Hospital cuts have already gone too far, but now we are facing a new round of major cuts as a result of inadequate funding in the provincial budget; and

"Whereas long-term-care and home care have never increased enough to keep pace with the hospital cuts. Ministry of Health data shows that there are more than 30,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care (nursing home) placements and wait times have tripled since 2005. Home care funding has been shrinking as a proportion of health funding and thousands are on wait-lists for home care. Announced funding levels in the

budget will not be enough to catch up with population need; and

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"Whereas we are the people who pay for health care. We believe it is better and more equitable to pay through a fair tax system that provides high-quality single-tier public health care based on need, not on our wealth. We reject the idea that health care be sold for profit and that we—the patients—be forced to pay for privatized care when we are sick and elderly and least able to afford care.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Stop hospital bed and service cuts in all community hospitals and, in particular, stop the cuts to—and closures of—small and rural hospitals. Conduct a proper evidence-based study of how many hospital beds are needed in Ontario and where.

"(2) Provide adequate funding across the health care continuum—from hospitals to long-term care and home care—to maintain existing services and address the wait-lists.

"(3) Stop the privatization of health care services, including for-profit privatization of our long-term-care homes for the elderly and home care.

"(4) Hold an open, public consultation across Ontario on the planned changes to hospital funding."

I support the petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Maya to bring it to the Clerk.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: "Whereas it is the right of every Canadian to vote once in each election for the candidate of his or her choice and have their vote fairly counted and not offset by faulty voter registration or any sort of illegal practices; and

"Whereas credible allegations of voting irregularities exist for the most recent election, including non-citizens voting, persons voting multiple times at various voting stations and errors on the permanent register of electors list; and

"Whereas the practice of 'vouching' has been practised in polling stations where it is not permitted, such as non-rural polling stations, and does not require verified proof of a person's age, citizenship and residence in a riding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support Bill 106, Prevention of Electoral Fraud Act, 2012, by Bas Balkissoon, the member for Scarborough–Rouge River, that would require that voters present proof of Canadian citizenship; require the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario to appoint an independent party to conduct a review of the permanent register of electors within six months after the bill passes and subsequently every five years; allow scrutineers to monitor the process by which voters add their names to the voters' list on election day; and forbid vouching, which

currently excludes the requirement for legitimate identification."

I hereby sign my name, and I will give the petition to Roberto.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people" in the province of Ontario and "creates \$1.5 billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

"Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

"Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario's agricultural and rural economies."

I'm pleased to sign this petition and pass it to my page Jenna.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury.

"Whereas the Ontario government" has made PET scanning "a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients" under certain conditions; and

"Whereas," since October 2009, "insured PET scans" are performed "in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with" Health Sciences North, "its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through" Health Sciences North, "thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask Mathilde to bring it to the Clerk.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Colle: This is a petition to replace the dirty diesel buses on Dufferin Street.

"Whereas Dufferin Street is a very congested street in the heart of Toronto with very serious pollution challenges; and

"Whereas the thousands of trips made on Dufferin by diesel buses 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, are adding to the" health problems of people in the Dufferin area;

"Whereas many of the residents on Dufferin are only a few feet away from the fumes produced by these diesel buses; and

"Whereas people cannot sit on their verandas or open their windows for fear of breathing these hazardous fumes; and" whereas when they open their windows the carbon monoxide detectors go off—Mr. Speaker, that's how bad it is on Dufferin—

"Whereas good, clean public transit is essential to the hard-working people who live on Dufferin or who ride on the Dufferin bus;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to replace the" dirty "diesel buses on Dufferin Street with electric transit vehicles or other transit vehicles that use non-polluting, clean energy sources."

I totally support the people on Dufferin and I put my name on it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of no accountability, complacency, waste, patient neglect and substandard care in our health care system;

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and oversight of most health care agencies is done by that agency or sometimes through the ministry;

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces in Canada where our Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of health care services;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include investigation of our health care services, including health units, hospitals, retirement homes, long-term-care facilities and ambulance services."

I agree with this petition, affix my name and send it to the table with Maya.

INDOOR TANNING EQUIPMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I must say that I agree with the petition that was just read also.

"Whereas there is a growing body of evidence linking tanning bed use to increased cancer risk, the World Health Organization considers tanning beds a group 1 carcinogen, and use of tanning beds before the age of 30 raises one's risk of melanoma by 75%; and

"Whereas many groups, including the Canadian Cancer Society and the Ontario Medical Association, support a ban on the use of indoor tanning equipment by youths under the age of 18; and

"Whereas the provinces of British Columbia and Nova Scotia have passed legislation banning youths from using

indoor tanning equipment, and governments around the world are considering similar legislation; and

"Whereas there is broad public support in Ontario for increased regulation of the tanning industry, with 83% supporting a ban on indoor tanning for those under 18;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning youths under the age of 18 from using indoor tanning equipment except in the case of medical need."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Simran to bring it to the Clerk.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My petition is from the people in Ottawa—Orléans.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;"—

Mr. John Yakubuski: What about the sinkhole?

Mr. Phil McNeely: "Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

And I'm sure that pothole will be fixed this week.

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HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has mismanaged negotiations with Ontario doctors; and

"Whereas this government has unilaterally imposed fee cuts that could negatively impact patients; and

"Whereas these changes will affect the ophthalmology, cardiology and radiology services that are currently crucial to many Ontarians' quality of life;

"We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government reach a negotiated settlement with the Ontario Medical Association that puts the needs of patients first and maintains a proper level of care for Ontarians."

I agree with this, sign my name to it and transfer it to page Roberto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ELECTRICITY SYSTEM OPERATOR ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ D'EXPLOITATION DU RÉSEAU D'ÉLECTRICITÉ DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 13, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to amalgamate the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Power Authority, to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts/ Projet de loi 75, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité pour fusionner la Société indépendante d'exploitation du réseau d'électricité et l'Office de l'électricité de l'Ontario, modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings to announce that there has been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader indicates otherwise.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The debate should continue, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Madam Speaker—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, Mr. House leader?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I believe this is supposed to be the lead, because the critic was not here and we had stood down our lead, if you check at the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're welcome, Peter.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The ways of House leaders are indeed mysterious to the rest of us.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You have a 20-minute speech; you can draw out the 20.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I can draw out the 20.

Madam Speaker, as you noted before I started talking, this is the last round of debate on Bill 75, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to amalgamate the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Power Authority etc.

Madam Speaker, if you had been here for the leadoff by the Minister of Energy and his parliamentary assistant—and you may have been here—you would not have known what this bill does, having listened to their one one-hour presentation. Effectively, the most significant, the largest piece of this bill turns off the lights on public scrutiny of power planning in Ontario. There are other matters that are addressed by the bill, but the largest, most significant piece, the one that is of greatest concern to the people of Ontario, is in fact this one piece. In doing so, this bill continues a Liberal tradition of continuously pushing the public out of scrutiny of power plans, of turning down the lights, of darkening the room to make sure that we legislators here, responsible for ensuring that the government is held to account, are dealt out; making sure that the people of Ontario have great difficulty in determining what actually is going on; and making sure that the people of Ontario aren't allowed in to see the numbers, the analysis, the assessments upon which any power planning for this province is based.

In the past, it was held that to assess the power plans for Ontario, one needed an environmental assessment. Frankly, it was something that, although never acted on, would have been extraordinarily useful for this government, for governments to come, and for governments that had the opportunity and the privilege to govern in the past. A full environmental assessment would have allowed the presentation of a government plan for provision of electricity in Ontario. Presentation before an environmental assessment board would have allowed questioning of witnesses, presentation of evidence and, most importantly, would have required the government of the day to present alternatives to the scenario that they put forward for consideration so that one could see, apples to apples, what made sense in terms of costs, oranges to oranges, what made sense in terms of the environment, so that in fact one of the central decisions around the operation of this province was subjected to the kind of thorough analysis that I believe and New Democrats believe is required for something of this magnitude.

You have to know that in 2006 when the first power plan—and I'll use this term once: the integrated power supply plan; I'll just call it the power plan. When that came forward, surprisingly enough, the government changed regulations so that the power plan was no longer to go through a full environmental assessment. Indeed, it was decided that it would go to a hearing at the Ontario

Energy Board on a far reduced scope of assessment. This bill takes that reduced scope for assessing power planning in Ontario and makes it far narrower, sets up the power of the minister to determine what the parameters are of questions to be asked and answered by the OEB and, for all of us, turns out the lights on public scrutiny.

The integrated power supply plan, the power plan, is replaced by what are called ministerial energy plans. The minister must consult with the Ontario Energy Board on the impact of the energy plan on consumers' electricity bills. Note, it doesn't say that the minister has to consult in public. It's not a question of hearings. It's a question of the minister being allowed to go to the Ontario Energy Board and say, "You know what? I need your advice. Is this going to be damaging? Is this going to be useful?" And then the minister gets to refer to the Ontario Energy Board and say, "I've done all this work. Take a look at these capital plans. Take a look at the cost. If you want to have hearings on the cost, go ahead." But the larger questions of cost-effectiveness, of compliance with the goals that have been set for electricity development in Ontario—set aside.

It deprives stakeholders—and there are many—deprives people who are concerned about the economic impact of the electricity system, about the environmental impact of the electricity system, of the ability to test, in open hearings, the evidence of the minister, the evidence of the government and the basis for its argument that this is the way we need to proceed with energy.

I have to say that the speeches made by the minister and his parliamentary assistant reflected the tradition of the Liberals when it comes to this issue, and that's that they didn't address the substance of the bill; they set that aside, talked about their virtue, patted themselves on the back and neglected to say a single word about the dramatic reduction in public scrutiny of energy planning in this province. I guess, if you're going to put people in the dark, you might as well not wait around. You might as well get at it from the get-go, and that's what the minister and his parliamentary assistant did.

I have to say that many people find that, after they listen to speeches in this Legislature, they shouldn't be allowed to drive heavy vehicles. There's a reason for that. One approaches these speeches with caution. One approaches listening to and reading the Hansard of these speeches with caution. I actually went through the speech of the minister and the parliamentary assistant; I listened to them while they were speaking; I took notes, and I went back to Hansard.

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I have their speeches before me. I would be happy to provide you with a copy, Speaker, if you wanted to go through and see if you could find any reference to this dramatic reduction in public scrutiny, but I can assure you right now that it's not there, and I can assure anyone who goes to the legislative website, looks up Bill 75, goes to the record of proceedings, goes to the speeches, that, again, you will not find it either, but you may deal

with the insomnia problem that is bedevilling you when you watch this show.

What the minister had to say was that in the years leading up to 2003, Ontario became more and more reliant on coal, on energy produced from coal, on energy that relied on a technology that had been around for centuries, which is in part true, but there is a larger truth, and that's that Ontario, which had bet everything on nuclear technology in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, in the 1990s found that plants that were supposed to last 40 years were not working anymore, were in dire need of rebuilding, because they had come to the actual functioning end of their lives. The motors, the reactors at the core of those power plants, had suffered far more wear than had been proposed by their engineers, and so the multi-billion-dollar expense that we had taken on as a province, that was supposed to be spread out over 40 years, suddenly the motor on that vehicle had died, and we were at the 25-year mark.

And so Ontario took its coal plants, which it had been using to provide power at what are called peak hours—when you have the highest demand in the middle of summer because it's so hot and everyone turns on their air conditioning, or peak demand in the middle of winter when everyone, concerned about the cold, cranks things up in their households, and those plants moved to providing the power that the prematurely deceased nuclear plants had been providing.

That's what the minister doesn't say, and he doesn't say that because his whole strategy is based on going back to that technology which caused such huge financial problems for Ontario, rebuilding it, expanding it and thus addressing electricity needs in Ontario. He told us part of the truth about what happened with coal but neglected to talk about how he was turning off the lights on public scrutiny.

As you go through, he talks what about the Ontario Power Authority is, what the Independent Electricity System Operator is. For those who are watching and are curious, the Ontario Power Authority develops plans for power in Ontario and secures contracts with suppliers who can provide us with that power. The Independent Electricity System Operator is the organization that actually runs the system on a day-to-day basis, matches the production of electricity to the demand for electricity, so that in the end our lights don't flicker in our homes and machinery does not go off in our office buildings or our factories.

He talked about that—a useful bit of explanation—but he didn't talk about this dramatic reduction in public scrutiny of his planning. He mentioned that this government is setting up a panel to look at what's called consolidation of local power companies. So if you're in Ottawa, consolidating the local distribution company that sends you your power bill in Ottawa—consolidating it with the power companies that provide the transmission lines in the communities around Ottawa; similarly Toronto; similarly Hamilton, London, Windsor.

That issue is one that will become more prominent later this year as the panel that was set up by the minister

meets and reports back. That initiative will have very dire impacts on the people of Ontario if it is allowed to go forward with the privatization of local distribution companies—again, a significant matter, but not what's in this bill.

The minister is quite studious. He avoids talking about the content of the bill. He talks about selling clean energy and developing clean energy technologies. He doesn't mention that there's a cap on the amount of renewable energy that Ontario will buy. He says that if we want to sell it abroad, if we want to export, we have to buy and use it here in Ontario. If, in a year or so, you stop buying it because you're too busy investing in nuclear power plants, quite frankly that undermines your argument around the world about the exportability of Ontario-made renewable energy technologies.

Mr. Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, also spoke, and he spoke quite a bit longer than the minister. But like the minister, he made sure that the change in the approvals process was not there. He talked about the history of power in Ontario, talked about Samsung, talked about the smart grid, smart meters, all of that; what the ISO does; what the OPA does. But with all this paper, neither of them talked about changing the way that power planning is done or reviewed or approved or scrutinized here in Ontario. That's substantial. That is substantial because, of all the changes that are made in this bill, this is the one that will have the greatest long-term impact on the people of Ontario, and I will expand on that as I go forward.

This bill ends the requirement in the Electricity Act to have public hearings and a decision by the energy board on power planning. The bill currently reads that once during each period prescribed by the regulations, every few years, or more frequently, the minister will have the board of the Ontario Power Authority submit to the Ontario Energy Board, the body that regulates prices in Ontario and regulates the electricity system and regulates the gas system, an integrated power supply plan, a power plan.

The board is given a number of duties, but summarized most neatly: "The board shall review each power plan submitted by the Ontario Power Authority to ensure it:

—complies with any directions issued by the minister; and

—is economically prudent and cost effective."

Who can argue with doing those things and doing them in public, doing them in a situation where stakeholders—and frankly, anyone who pays a hydro bill in this province is a stakeholder—giving stakeholders the opportunity to look at what's actually being done, question it and say, "We want changes to this"? It has been dramatically changed.

The new wording says, "The minister may, in consultation with" this new body that's being set up under the act "or any other person, develop and ... issue energy plans." It says that "in developing the energy plan and before issuing it, the minister shall consult with the board

on the impact of the implementation of the energy plan on a consumer's electricity bill." As I mentioned, that doesn't mean a consultation in public; that doesn't mean a detailed review of the numbers, projections and assumptions of the minister in public. It simply means that the minister may, if he or she so desires, go and talk with the regulators and get their opinion on how this works for consumers.

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Speaker, the one thing the minister is required to do is "refer an energy plan to the board for the board's review of estimated capital costs in the plan." Then the minister can require the board to look at other matters—or not. It's up to the minister's discretion.

So if you are concerned about what electricity is costing you in Ontario, and you want an opportunity, before another \$10 billion, \$50 billion, \$100 billion is spent—if you want an opportunity to actually get in there and have an impact in a formal assessment, well, in fact, most of what you would be able to comment on has been taken away.

If the minister decides, in referring this whole thing to the regulator, that he didn't really mean to have them look at how this or that works, well, then the minister can say, "I'm changing the terms of referral."

It is a very substantial reduction of the public's right to question government and hold it accountable—a very substantial reduction, a matter not mentioned once by the minister or his parliamentary assistant when they presented this bill to the Legislature.

There are consequences to taking away public scrutiny. There are consequences to putting people in the dark. We have seen a number of those, and I want to address just a few in my opportunity to speak today.

It is very difficult, if you are a member of the public, to find out what's really going on in government. It is unfortunate. I think it's wrong, but I think it's true. I need to tell members of the public who ask, "Why is it that I can't find out why this or that decision is made?"—what the factors were that were balanced against each other—that for most legislators in this chamber, that's the real situation we face as well. That's the difficulty we face. It is very hard to get an assessment from this Liberal government as to why they've made the decisions they've made, so that they can be held accountable.

If we can't get useful information, if we can't find out the basis for decisions, how is the public supposed to do it? How is the government supposed to be held accountable? Can it only be held accountable when the bills get so high that people, through sheer rage, decide to throw out a government? Does it have to go to that? Does it have to wait until the system starts flickering and faltering before it can be seen that the government has made substantial and profound mistakes in decisions around electricity planning and investment? Why does it have to wait to go to that stage?

Speaker, things should not be set up that way. We should be able to get answers, and the public should be able to, in an open hearing of the regulator, the Ontario

Energy Board, question and assess power planning in this province.

Just in the last few months, I've had an opportunity to sit on a committee here in the Legislature. Most people won't know about it; it's called the estimates committee. Ministries bring in their numbers. They bring in the senior staff. They bring in the deputy minister. They sit before a committee of the Legislature, and in turn, each party gets an opportunity to ask questions of the minister. Sometimes we use that time wisely; sometimes not as well as we could or should. But in general, my experience is people try to get answers so they understand what's going on and so that they can hold a government to account.

Speaker, one of the questions I asked the Minister of Energy was how he and the Ministry of Energy decided on the level of investment in nuclear power in Ontario. I asked the minister why his government believed that it was necessary to maintain nuclear power at 50% of the grid mix over the next 30 years. Why is it that half our power should come from nuclear?

After all, this is a technology now that's half a century old, 60 years old. The world's been moving on. There are a lot more cost-effective options out there. We know the kinds of risks that we run. How did you decide on 50%? Why not 20%? Why not 80%?

When I asked the minister that question, his response was: "It's interesting. Yesterday, I believe, was the 50th anniversary of nuclear power in the province of Ontario."

Speaker, I have to say that was not a direct response. That did not actually get at the heart of the question I was asking. It was a delay answer. It ate up a few minutes. In fact, I wasn't asking something exotic, something that was currently the subject of a judicial inquiry or of a court case. I was just saying, "How did you determine this percentage instead of that percentage?" Surely somewhere in this vast Ministry of Energy someone has thought about why this percentage and not that percentage.

The minister went on to talk about the development of Candu technology in Canada, historically interesting but not the reason why you decide on one level of investment or another. So I asked him again, "Could you please give us an undertaking to provide the background documentation and analysis justifying your position that nuclear should remain at 50% of the grid mix?"

And the answer I got was, "Well, I think you can—different countries and different jurisdictions can make a different determination—"

Fair enough. I wasn't asking for other countries. You know, I'm not being greedy. I just want to know why the government of Ontario makes this decision. That's all I wanted.

And his answer for my third try was, "I'm sure that part of the determination was the fact that nuclear has historically been part of our mix here in the province of Ontario...."

You know, Speaker, just saying that we're going to do it because we've done it in the past is not necessarily a

good way to do business. I like to breathe. I did breathing in the past. I hope to breathe in the future. I hope to breathe for a long time. But I'm asking a different kind of question.

You're about to invest tens of billions of dollars in the electricity system of this province, the nerve system of the province. Why is it that you've made this or that decision? And what I got was, "Well ... the long-term energy plan was the subject of much discussion, a public hearing, analysis, no doubt questions in the House, and you would have been part of those discussions, quite significantly."

Well, there weren't discussions. There was presentation of this long-term energy plan. But discussions? No. It wasn't adopted by the Legislature. It didn't go through any agency for review. No, Speaker. There was no rationale for this very significant decision.

We tried to get information from the minister on his experience with the Mississauga power plant. Very roughly, the story from 2005 to 2011 is this: that the developers got a contract in 2005 but had difficulty getting financing, and they went for years. They went through approval processes but they didn't find anyone who was willing to give them money. Why exactly that's the case, I don't know. I don't have access to such documentation. But I do know that in the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and so on, our former leader Howard Hampton and myself, once I got here in 2006, talked about the risks of these private power deals, the risk in cost and, frankly, the risk in the government's approach to building all these gas-fired power plants that could well turn out to be unnecessary. In fact, I think most of them are unnecessary and that an investment in efficiency and conservation would have been far more sensible and far less risky. But the government didn't listen to that.

1620

In 2010, finally Eastern Power Developers got money. Someone was willing to bankroll them. It turns out to be that an American hedge fund bankrolled them. They moved on with construction.

So, Speaker, in the fall of 2011, a government that had decided to go forward with private power deals, that had decided to go forward with a technology that was more expensive than efficiency and conservation, found itself in a jam at roughly the 11th hour of the election in 2011, and decided that the crisis it had created in approving this plant was one it would solve to get seats, and we got stuck with the bill.

Mr. Leone from the opposition party put forward a motion to compel provision of documents to the estimates committee. Because the government resisted that, we passed a motion asking the Speaker of this Legislature to find the Minister of Energy in contempt. Mr. Leone was very straightforward in his request and very logical in his arguments. He said, on Wednesday, May 16, 2012—and these are comments later in the hearings—the Standing Committee on Estimates passed a motion that required the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to provide the committee with

documents relating to the Oakville and Mississauga power plants.

The Minister of Energy, on behalf of the Ministry of Energy, responded to the committee on May 30, 2012, and stated, "In light of the confidential, privileged and highly commercially sensitive nature of these issues, it would not be appropriate for my office or the ministry to disclose information that would prejudice these ongoing negotiations and litigation."

I have to say that Mr. Leone made a very powerful argument, pointing out that the Harper government in Ottawa had similarly tried to deny access to documents regarding Afghan detainees to a committee of that Parliament, and in that case, the minister involved was found by the Speaker to be in contempt of the House.

We are elected to oversee the well-being and business of the people of Ontario. You may not like individual legislators; you may like them a lot. Their likability is irrelevant. Their duty is clear. They have to hold government to account, and to do that, they have to have access to documentation.

This minister hid behind the argument that this whole matter was before the courts. When an agreement was reached, a deal was made, we were provided with some of the documents that bore on this matter. I had an opportunity, with others, to review those documents.

Speaker, it would be very useful for us as legislators to actually see fully the documentation and not the documentation at the level of, "I've been told by the minister that you have to stop this," and then the running around, the to-ing and fro-ing, in the Ontario Power Authority.

I say all this because even when threatened with a finding of contempt of the Legislature, the minister didn't provide the documentation that was requested. The bill before us will give the minister and the government even more insulation against providing scrutiny of the minister's and the ministry's actions. I think that's the wrong direction. I don't think it's the direction Ontario wants. I think it's a direction that will lead to even more costly power, and frankly, I don't think this Legislature should support that.

I note Eastern Power developers in Mississauga—but there's the Oakville plant as well—in the course of that fight, when the residents came to see me and presented their arguments about why a large—I think it was a 900-megawatt—power plant, should not be situated very close to their homes, when we reviewed the power needs in the southwest GTA, it became clear that this plant was not defensible. And yet the government went on and on and on until it became very clear that the seat in Oakville would be lost. At that point, a decision was made to change course.

For us, we are still waiting for the documentation. If a committee of the Legislature requests such documents, and that is carried by a majority of that committee, and the minister still will not provide information, how much worse will it be when the minister is provided an even greater level of protection against scrutiny of his power planning?

We have had experience with this government and its decisions around expenditures. We went through, and are still going through, the whole expense of smart meters, spending somewhere in the range of \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion across the province. Interestingly, I actually went to the documents that are available by the consultants, Navigant, who looked at what the benefit would be from spending that \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion, and the consultants at that time said, "You know what? You'll likely reduce the amount of power consumed by houses by 1% across the province as a whole." Since residential uses are somewhere in the range of 25% to 30% of our electricity use, they're talking about one third of 1% reduced for about \$1.5 billion or \$2 billion.

Think for one moment about how we could have reduced people's home electricity bills by providing that fund for low-interest loans so that people could dramatically increase their insulation and reduce their consumption. Then we would have been getting somewhere, because I find most people have had enough stick. They've been beaten enough. They know it's pricy. What they don't have is that carrot that allows them to actually make the investments to weatherseal their homes. They need the money, which they would pay back on their hydro bill. You have a low-interest loan, and you pay it off over 10 years, 15 years, 20 years. If people could reduce their energy costs now, they would. Instead of helping them that way, we made a lot of people much richer by proceeding with smart meters at a minimal savings: one third of 1% of peak power in Ontario. We're not talking about a lot of money.

Do we want to actually give this government even more cover—more cover of darkness—when it makes decisions about energy and electricity?

1630

Decisions made about power will affect day-to-day costs, but they also have substantial impact on the credit rating of this province. I asked the minister if he had actually looked at the impact of nuclear power on Ontario's credit rating, because I had an opportunity to look at the study or the commentary made by Standard and Poor's on the credit rating of Ontario Power Generation.

You should know that this is a company, a utility, that sells into a relatively closed market. We're not competing with Chinese electricity; we're competing with electricity producers in northeastern North America.

Standard and Poor's gives Ontario Power Generation an A rating because its debt is guaranteed by the province of Ontario—although they use different words. They say, "We can't imagine that Ontario wouldn't step in and help deal with any cash crisis if OPG was in trouble." But they say that if Ontario Power Generation didn't have the government of Ontario backing it up, didn't have all of us in this chamber and all of you watching on television, didn't have access to our wallets and bank accounts to provide those guarantees, then its rating would be BBB.

If you go one step below that, that's a junk bond. That's the same credit rating as Spain or Ireland. I don't

know about others, but as I read the business pages, Spain is not doing as well as one would hope.

Standard and Poor's says that it gives it that low rating in part because "[w]eak cash flow metrics and operational and nuclear technology risk offset these credit strengths." So in fact, investment in nuclear power damages the credit rating of Ontario Power Generation. The province of Ontario is carrying that burden.

Speaker, the province of New Brunswick had its credit rating downgraded by Moody's in 2009. Why did Moody's downgrade the credit rating of New Brunswick? I'll read:

"The rating action also reflects Moody's assessment of the risks associated with New Brunswick Power.... The narrowing of" New Brunswick Power's "margins in recent years, in conjunction with high leverage and risks related to the refurbishment of the Point Lepreau nuclear generating station, represents an element of risk for" New Brunswick Power. As such, New Brunswick Power's "provincially guaranteed debt, which is borrowed by the province and on-lent to" New Brunswick Power, "constitutes a contingent liability for the province."

Large-scale investment in nuclear power puts a province's and company's credit rating at risk. Just this year in the United Kingdom, some very large power companies, RWE and E.ON, major players in the European electricity market, dropped out of contracts that they were going to sign with the government of the UK for nuclear power plants. Why? Because it would affect their credit rating. They said that they would have been forced into a credit rating downgrade.

It's pretty clear that when you are investing tens of billions of dollars in a technology that has high risk, as defined by credit rating companies, you need to be very cautious. You need to have your eyes open. You need to be watching.

I asked the minister about this, and the minister, first of all, when I asked him about whether or not he or the ministry had assessed the credit risk, said, "Personally, no." I assured him that I didn't really know if the minister was qualified to assess credit risk. Had he asked his staff? Had he asked his ministry? Was he, in fact, as minister, looking out for the interests of the people of Ontario, looking out for the risk to our finances from these investments? I got a lot of talk about how different bodies within Ontario—the OPG, Hydro One—were looking at their risks, but in repeated questioning, he could not tell me that he had actually taken a look at the risk that Ontario was assuming in proceeding with large-scale nuclear refurbishment and construction.

That is a minister who is not doing his job. Either he doesn't know what's going on, doesn't know what risk we're running, or will not tell what he thinks and is thus evading accountability. I don't know which of those is true, but that's the reality that we face today.

Should we give this government, should we give this minister, greater protection by turning off the lights of public scrutiny? I don't think so. I don't think that's what the people of Ontario want. I don't think that's what they expect from us. They expect us to keep our eyes open.

I asked the minister separately about the refurbishment of the Darlington nuclear power plant and risk management there and the building of a new nuclear power plant at Darlington. You may well know the experience we've had in Ontario, that we have never avoided having a large nuclear project go over budget. It just hasn't happened. In fact, interestingly, about a month ago I was going through some documents in reference to another case and came across a note about the Bruce nuclear power plant refurbishment, which, by the way, is not complete as of today. That was supposed to have been done in 2009. That's over budget. The government of Ontario is stuck with a chunk of that over budget, the government of Ontario having negotiated a price increase to Bruce nuclear for what I'm told are reasons related to that overrun.

So I asked this minister what it was going to cost to refurbish Darlington, and what I got back was that the ultimate cost is not known, that this government has spent \$600 million to hire companies to do construction schedules and contracts, to actually even build a fake reactor. And I believe that if you go along the 401 near Darlington you will see that fake reactor under construction. The minister won't answer questions about at what point nuclear power is no longer financially acceptable, because I think the reality is, it doesn't matter what the cost is. The commitment to the technology far exceeds any commitment to wise public spending.

Instead of calling for bids on a refurbishment that would require the contractor to accept all the risk, what the minister told us was that building his fake reactor so that people could practise on it, breaking up the contract into six other contracts, and within that having it broken down into half-hour segments—that's the risk management. The Darlington plant went from about a \$3-billion or \$4-billion budget to \$13 or \$14 billion on completion. And I would say that if the minister continues with the plans that he's put forward, continues to throw good money after the \$600 million he's already put down, once again we will face extraordinary costs at this location.

1640

Should the minister be allowed to plan for these kinds of power expenditures without having to go to a regulator in public session, present testimony and evidence and be questioned? Should he be excused from that? Should the public be put into the dark? No, I don't think so, Minister. I don't think that makes any sense at all. I don't think it makes sense for the well-being of the province. It doesn't make sense for the well-being of our electricity system.

A few years ago, public bids were let for construction of new nuclear reactors at Darlington. The prices that came in have never been officially revealed—never, never. The Toronto Star published a number that has not been challenged, saying that it would cost \$26 billion. Those of you who are at home watching this would say, "Well, \$26 billion is a lot." Compared to what? Is that what they normally cost? Can you get a better deal on a used nuclear reactor somewhere at a lower price? The

budget that Ontario Power Generation had to build that plant was more in the \$6-billion to \$10-billion range. This blew past any budget or assessment of what it should cost—completely past. The minister has not revealed the cost and has decided to proceed with a bidding process for new nuclear reactors, but has not made it clear, frankly, as I went through the notes from his statements at the estimate committee, whether we would be protected from any overrun.

The minister was asked about the source for his estimates of the cost—one of his staffers was there—of the refurbishment and said it was close to \$2 billion per reactor, that the cost was somewhere between \$6 billion and \$10 billion. And I asked for some refinement on that because, Speaker, I don't know about you—maybe I'm old-fashioned; maybe some of my colleagues may think differently—but when I'm going to spend \$10 billion, I like to have some idea as to whether or not that's really the ballpark. Is that really it? Is that a close enough cost that I can say, "Yes, that's where I'm going"?

It doesn't appear that that's going to be the case. It looks like what we're going to get is a decision to go forward because this government wants to go forward. In the course of discussion, I asked the minister about his long-term energy plan. I was told that the numbers in there were very, very rough—a very rough ballpark estimate. That could well say, then, that the \$86-billion estimate, upon which a whole variety of decisions are made, bears only the vaguest resemblance to what is real, that in fact estimates that we could be talking about more like \$120 billion or \$160 billion are just as credible. If I have a minister who says, "That estimate prepared by my department, using some of the most experienced electricity industry people in North America, people who were loaned to New Brunswick to help them with their problems"—if their best guess is off by, what, almost 100% in their estimates and is referred to by the minister as very, very rough, what kind of plan do we have? What kind of plan do we have? Because, in fact, the process that was set up in law by this government was ignored by this government for the last few years, the kind of process we have is one that doesn't get subjected to public scrutiny, to cross-examination, to assessment by stakeholders and to the kind of rigour that I believe the people of Ontario deserve.

If you go back to this energy plan that the Liberals released in 2010, you'll see that they expected that from November to January 2011, there would be a posting on the environmental registry, that in the middle of 2011, the Ontario Power Authority would prepare a detailed power plan, full of consultation, and submit the whole matter to the Ontario Energy Board, and the Ontario Energy Board would review it between 2011 and 2012. That's the Electricity Act. That track is what's set up in existing legislation. Existing legislation was ignored.

The minister wants legislation that doesn't force him to go through all that rough, demanding, tough stuff, where he has to provide pretty sophisticated estimates and allow them to be tested in a public forum. That's what he wants: He wants to get away from that. He wants

to be able to do what he wants to do, without public accountability, because I have to say that these plans don't go through a committee here at the Legislature. I know people say to me, "Don't you get to approve this whole framework?" I say, "No. It's supposed to be a regulatory body, the Ontario Energy Board. It reviews the plans, makes sure they reflect the needs of the province and approves, disapproves or amends them." That was ignored, and the government has brought forward a bill that gives it a much freer hand.

Speaker, as you well know, some very strange things grow in the dark, and putting an energy plan in the dark, making sure that it can't be tested or examined, that no light can be thrown upon it, does not bode well for the province of Ontario.

This bill purports to save money by consolidating some functions. I mentioned at the beginning of my hour bringing together the Ontario Power Authority, which does planning, signs contracts with power generators, and the Independent Electricity System Operator that, actually, on a day-to-day basis, runs the system from control centres here in Ontario. I actually think that has some limited use; it's probably not bad to explore that. I don't think we need two CEOs; I don't think we need two boards of directors. I think saving money in that area may be useful to the people of Ontario. But, frankly, if that's what's offered and the price is a dramatic reduction in scrutiny of government activity and a dramatic increase in the risks that we as a province take with power planning, then that doesn't serve us. It doesn't serve the Legislature; it doesn't serve the province.

I think that this bill needs to be dramatically revised. It needs to have public scrutiny in it upheld. It needs to be reviewed by committee so that those parts that are worth saving and using are saved and used, but those parts that make it even less likely that good decisions will be made for this province with regard to power are taken out of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to rise in this House and respond to the honourable member from Toronto—Danforth, who made deliberation on Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. The member touched a few bases about Ontario's electricity system as a whole.

1650

In the couple of minutes' time I have, I just want to briefly mention a few points about this government's achievements in the area of the electricity system in this province.

When we came into office in 2003, Madam Speaker, we were facing blackouts, brownouts, importing electricity from the US and Quebec and our neighbours in general. Our electricity system was in bad shape at that time.

Since then, we have invested \$13 billion in new generation. We have brought 9,000 megawatts of new power to the grid—this is a major achievement—which is basically one fifth of our capacity in total. We have also

invested \$10 billion in upgrading our transmission system. We have built and maintained about 5,000 kilometres of our transmission system. This is the distance from Toronto to Vancouver. It's a major, major achievement.

We have also made a policy decision, Madam Speaker, to get rid of dirty coal. As we know, just burning coal costs about \$4 billion every year to our health care system because it causes asthma and other respiratory diseases in people who live around coal-fired plants. So we made a decision to get rid of dirty coal. This in itself is a major achievement we brought to the electricity system in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a couple of minutes of questions and comments.

I appreciate what the member for Toronto–Danforth put on the record today. That was his lead.

This bill, Bill 75, was tabled for first reading on April 26, and I think it really speaks to this government's inability to manage the minority. If you look back to the election, from the election to April 24 this government opposite was only able to get the Supply Act, the Jewish Heritage Month and my bill, Isaac Brock Day—because they can't manage the minority.

We took five months to get committees. We've been back now, Speaker, for three weeks. This is the third week. We've now had a couple of days of sitting. We still have no committees, so it's a moot point whether this bill collapses today; there are no committees for it to go to for second reading.

Again, it just speaks to how this government is unable to manage their legislative agenda. We needed a programming motion to be able to get Bill 19, Bill 13, Bill 55—we had to actually get a programming motion together.

So here we sit, debating this bill—and Bill 2 this morning. There are no committees for it to go to. They sat here and complained about us ringing the bells about the committee for Ornge, yet this group here blamed us for Bill 11, blamed us for a whole host of things. They blamed us this morning.

The fact of the matter is, you've got to understand that last week you weren't given a majority, so you're going to need to work with the opposition parties. If you're going to put legislation through, if you want it managed, you'd better start working with the opposition.

This is crazy. You need some committees to operate this House. Don't wait another five months.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments. The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour for me to stand up and speak on the comments of the member for Toronto–Danforth, who actually talked about Bill 75.

Like a lot of the bills that I've seen since I've been here, there's a good part that the government likes to talk about—merging some and saving some money—but in there, there's the not-so-good part—

Interjection: The dark part.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, the darker side. They don't seem to like public scrutiny on a lot of their power issues, so they've decided, in this bill, that they'll remove some of that. That's the goal here. The member from Richmond Hill talked about all the good things, but he didn't talk about the bill. He didn't talk about what exactly is in this bill.

The member from Leeds–Grenville had other issues, but once again, he didn't talk about the bill.

The member from Toronto–Danforth hit the nail on the head. What this province needs is—and we talked about this yesterday—freedom of information. What makes government better is more public information, not less. When governments are subject to scrutiny, they make better decisions. Each time you take a step to reduce public scrutiny, you increase the likelihood or the possibility of future problems.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Like Ornge.

Mr. John Vanthof: Like Ornge. We're increasingly disappointed that instead of making legislation stronger, there are always poison pills in there to make it weaker.

This bill needs to be very strongly amended.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to speak to this bill today. Basically, it's putting two organizations together, the IESO and the OPA, to make them more efficient. They both had a planning function within electrical generation in Ontario, so there's a \$25-million savings just in putting them together, and more savings if you put the two—the planning will be better as one organization. So that's what the bill is about.

I'd like to say that I'm so pleased that Ontario will be out of coal in 2014. This is amazing. This is the first government in the world that has taken that initiative of getting out of coal. We did it for medical reasons; there are \$3-billion to \$4-billion worth of savings just from asthma, etc.—all those chemicals that come out of coal. Coal should not be used anymore. We know that. We know that that's important.

The feds don't agree with that, because they came out with their new reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired generation of electricity regulations. It should not be the reduction of carbon dioxide; it's the increasing of carbon dioxide, because they're actually pushing coal plants across the rest of Canada when Ontario has taken the initiative to get out of it. So I really think it's important that we give credit where credit is due. This government, since 2003, has us almost out of coal, and we're saving in the medical system.

More importantly, the carbon dioxide, which is now at 396 parts per million—I'm sure that you don't understand that because you don't even want to mention carbon. I'll mention carbon: 396 parts per million and rising. The Arctic ice reduction—the lowest ever—is coming out in a few days. The Arctic ice is going to lose a huge amount of coverage. And if that's not the canary in the coal mine, I don't know what is.

So, get on board. Go along with Ontario doing a great job on energy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Toronto—Danforth has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, first of all, of course, my thanks to the members from Richmond Hill, Leeds—Grenville, Timiskaming—Cochrane and Ottawa—Orléans. I appreciate the fact that people listened to my speech and had useful comments. I want to say that the member from Leeds—Grenville is right: There is no committee for this to go to, in any event. It will be interesting to see what happens in the next few days, whether we get committees or don't get committees.

To the members from Richmond Hill and Ottawa—Orléans, I think you do the bill a disservice, even on your own terms, if you don't explain why you want to cut out public scrutiny. I'm sure you'll put it in different words, but you have to explain why you no longer want a power planning system to go through a regulatory assessment. You seem to assume that your government will be in power in the future. We've gone through this debate before. Every party in this chamber has gone through the cycle of being in government and in opposition, and I think it behooves everyone to ensure that there are democratic structures in place so that no matter which government is in power, their electricity planning regime or idea or scheme—take your pick—actually has to go through a rigorous hearing, because there may be those who come to power at some point for whom getting rid of coal is not a concern whatsoever. How will you hold them in check if you have no ability to have an impact on power planning? Speaker, this bill should not become law in its current form.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. I wish to correct my own record, in that, by mistake, I referred to the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane as Algoma—Manitoulin, so I just want the record to show.

A point of order.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order to clarify a comment I made yesterday. As I got up to speak on Bill 50, it was brought to my attention about the anniversary of Canada's declaration of war on Germany. I thought it was an important item to mention, and I tried to work it into my discussion. I certainly withdraw the comment if it offended the other side. There was no intention to it. It was more to highlight this important event in Canadian history, one of the more important events in the 20th century, as I understood it hadn't been brought up yesterday. I apologize if it was misinterpreted in any way, but that was the intent.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): On a point of order?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Madam Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to present a motion. Do we?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just on a point of order: I do know what the motion is, but I just want to be clear that when the government gets up for these things, to say, "I have a unanimous consent motion dealing with...." so that we're clear about what we're talking about.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I always like to please my friend. He's right in wanting to get that information out. I believe we have unanimous consent for a motion on when the House is going to sit.

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Okay. I move that, notwithstanding standing order 6(a), when the House adjourns on Thursday, September 13, 2012, it shall stand adjourned until Wednesday, September 19, 2012.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Do you want to read it again, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes, that notwithstanding standing order 6(a), when the House adjourns on Thursday, September 13, 2012, it shall stand adjourned until Wednesday, September 19, 2012. Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Administrator has been pleased to assent to certain bills in the Lieutenant Governor's office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

An Act respecting the continuation and establishment of development funds in order to promote regional economic development in eastern and southwestern Ontario / Loi concernant la prorogation et la création de fonds de développement pour promouvoir le développement économique régional dans l'Est et le Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario.

An Act to implement restraint measures in the education sector / Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures de restriction dans le secteur de l'éducation.

An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to the Board of Internal Economy / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative relativement à la Commission de régie interne.

ONTARIO ELECTRICITY SYSTEM OPERATOR ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ D'EXPLOITATION DU RÉSEAU D'ÉLECTRICITÉ DE L'ONTARIO

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 75 here this afternoon. We had a little interruption in the proceedings, so that is the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act, just in case you're just tuning in.

Here it is, five after 5, on a Tuesday, I believe it is, and we've been talking about this bill for quite a long time, I believe. As the member from Leeds–Grenville pointed out just a few minutes ago, it was tabled in late April. There hasn't been a whole lot of discussion on that, but there certainly has been some here today.

As the PC critic for red tape reduction, I'm generally speaking in favour of something that reduces the size and cost of government and makes it easier for our businesses to do business in the province of Ontario. But somehow, this government even manages to miss the mark when they're trying to do that—find cost savings in the energy sector. That's what this is aimed at doing. It's aimed at saving millions of dollars by amalgamating or getting rid of one bureaucracy, merging it with another. Total savings: \$25 million.

It kind of pales in comparison to what has been going on with the Liberal government over the summer months. In case you were at the cottage and weren't keeping up with the papers, it was announced at estimates committee by the Minister of Energy himself that it was going to cost \$190 million to buy four Liberal votes in the last election by cancelling the power plant in Mississauga, that plant since moving to the Sarnia–Lambton area. It was big news over the summer, and maybe you missed it. That's what this government has been doing with your tax dollars: blowing \$190 million to cancel a power plant. Then they bring in a bill called Bill 75, aimed at saving \$25 million.

The Ontario Power Authority was created 15 years ago as a transitional body to manage Ontario's energy supply. The problem with anything that's created as a transitional body by this government is that it soon becomes a permanent body, and it grows exponentially. It is now a large bureaucracy that is sucking cash, taxpayers' money, out at record amounts. Governments get addicted to spending money, especially this one, and this government has spent more than any other government in the history of the province, and you can take that to the bank.

I suppose I should say that this government has not just spent more money than any other government; they've wasted more than any other government in the history of Ontario as well. After a couple of billion wasted on the eHealth scandal, there were a billion or so wasted on the Ornge scandal. That was also making headlines over the summer. We already mentioned the \$190 million on the cancelled power plant for Mississauga to save four Liberal seats there, and maybe a couple of hundred million more to cancel a power plant in Oakville.

The minister comes in here touting a bill with a meagre savings of \$25 million. It kind of pales in comparison to the money that has been wasted by this government.

There are currently 235 people employed at the Ontario Power Authority. As I was mentioning, the OPA is one of these alphabet soup of agencies that are out there. There are 235 now in this transitional body that had 15 at first. Now there are 235 there, and 87 of them are on the sunshine list. If you're not familiar with the sunshine list, they're making over \$100,000—87 of the 235 there are making over \$100,000 a year. The CEO of the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority, makes \$570,000 per year. So where are we saving money here?

If we're just going to take all the bureaucrats working at the OPA and move them across the hall to the IESO, then we're debating yet another piece of Liberal legislation whose sole purpose is to make a useless government seem active. This is the second time I've been up debating a bill here today—Bill 2 earlier this morning: more window dressing in Bill 2. The same thing is being done on the power front with this Bill 75.

If we're talking about shuttering the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority, and transferring its responsibilities to the IESO, then why isn't the minister simply saying that? Where are the savings coming from? Is the minister simply pulling this \$25-million figure out of the clear blue sky? The minister tends to favour things that you can pull out of the clear blue sky.

This bill also fails to seriously address the problems with ministerial accountability. As the member from Toronto–Danforth pointed out in his hour-long response to the minister, the accountability doesn't exist. The ministerial accountability that currently plagues the electricity system in the province is huge. We need some more transparency and we need some more accountability, and this bill does nothing to provide more transparency or accountability. As the member from the third party pointed out, it actually puts a lot more things in the dark when it comes to the power sector, and he was right when he said that.

Last spring, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers came out, and they critiqued the government's green energy policy on a purely scientific basis for the problems it was creating in the electricity grid in Ontario.

1710

We cannot seriously be considering any bill with regard to the energy sector that doesn't hold the minister accountable for serious technical and engineering problems that can and have occurred with the grid thanks to the political calculations of both his office and the Premier's office as well. Sometimes we wonder which office is actually looking after the power grid. As a matter of fact, I think a lot of us wonder who is calling the shots over there. Is it anybody in government or is it a Liberal campaign team? When it comes to the Mississauga power plants, I think we got our answer. It was political organizers that were calling the shots here on public policy, and it was quite clear from the minister over the summer that that was the case.

Unless we get some transparency in this bill and a little more accountability, it's not there. All we're doing is changing a coat of paint on the ministry that's in need

of actual structural reform. Last month, 66% of Ontario's small business owners listed rising energy prices as their number one cost pressure. That's higher than every other province except for PEI and Nova Scotia. I'm not sure if it's a coincidence or not that PEI is the only jurisdiction on the continent with higher electricity rates than Ontario. That's on the continent. That's North America. It's a lot of jurisdictions. So there's only one, actually, that's higher, and that's Prince Edward Island.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They have no generation there.

Mr. Todd Smith: Yes. Here we are back in Ontario, and ninth out of 10 is not usually good when we're talking about the provinces, right? We're at the bottom of the list next to Prince Edward Island. We can do much better than that, considering the fact that Ontario, before this government took power, actually had the most affordable energy in North America, and now we have PEI that is the only one that actually has higher electricity prices. We have to start to get our electricity prices under control.

Tim Hudak and our party have put several ideas on the table for this government. What does this government do? Ignore them. They put out Bill 75, which is aimed at saving \$25 million and that's about it—no big structural changes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And will it actually save anything?

Mr. Todd Smith: I guess that's the question: Is it actually going to do anything to find savings?

This morning in the House, as I mentioned, I spoke about Bill 2. Here I speak about Bill 75. Bill 2 spoke about a bill that we can't afford, aimed at people who can't afford it, to create work for tradespeople that we're not even training. This afternoon we've got Bill 75, aimed at reducing the size of government, that doesn't actually reduce the size of government. It's a bill to reduce the cost of the Ministry of Energy that won't save ratepayers a single dollar on their electricity bill, and that's very unfortunate: a bill that acknowledges real problems in the Ministry of Energy and then completely ignores them.

I have a lot of energy concerns in Prince Edward-Hastings riding. I've spoken about them many times here in the House. I've talked about the wind turbine issue on the south shore of Prince Edward county that this government continues to force in there, despite the fact that the municipality of Prince Edward county has very clearly said that they don't want them there. As a matter of fact, over the summer, one of the newspapers actually had a well-orchestrated referendum in South Marysburgh, where the majority of these wind turbines are slated to go: 90.2% of the people who turned out—and there were 62.5% of the people in South Marysburgh that showed up—said they don't want turbines in the community. The municipal council is on board.

Dalton McGuinty, back in April, actually said in the Belleville Intelligencer newspaper that communities without majority support for wind turbines would go to "the back of the line." I'm just wondering if the Minister

of the Environment, who actually has the powers in the EBR process that are granted to him, will do the right thing and stop any wind turbines from going into Prince Edward county. That's what is driving up the prices in the province of Ontario.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Maybe Dalton McGuinty could just keep his word, for once.

Mr. Todd Smith: Or perhaps McGuinty could keep his word. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Just following my earlier comments on Bill 75, I would like just to make a few more comments about the content of the bill, basically.

The bill is basically bringing the two organizations, the Ontario Power Authority and also the Independent Electricity System Operator—these two agencies will be combined and they will be merged together and will form a new agency called the Ontario Electricity System Operator. One of the reasons that we are merging these two agencies together is based on our achievements in improving the electricity system in Ontario over the past nine years. As a result, we always have been trying to increase the efficiency of agencies. In the past year, we asked Ontario agencies to look for savings in their organizations, and they responded with \$1 billion in savings in the whole of the agencies in Ontario. And by this merger, we are going to make a \$25-million saving. This constitutes about 15% of the operating costs of these agencies.

Bill 75, if passed, will create one single agency which will be responsible for market operations, and it will also be responsible for providing opportunities to increase contract efficiencies, while not impeding the fairness and transparency imbedded in the market rules.

It's also going to provide streamlining of the system to reduce administration burden on local electricity distribution companies. It will also create an electricity system that is going to be more responsive to the changing conditions in our electricity system as we move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to talk about Bill 75, because, of course, without energy, none of us could survive in our homes. Energy is a pinnacle thing that we need to have: heat, hydro—you know, cook our meals on the stove. So it's a very important topic, and that we discuss it.

The fact that Bill 75 is looking at increasing efficiencies and taking agencies and combining them into one single agency is a good thing, because it's saving money. But, then, we also have to think about how we are going to save money for the regular consumer, and our member from Toronto-Danforth touched upon that.

Conservation is very important for consumers to save money as well, and if we have those conservation programs for helping people to get high-efficiency furnaces, change their windows and also put in insulation, that

could help the average person. Absolutely, we want to make sure that the government agencies are running in the most efficient way they can so that money isn't wasted and those extra expenses passed on to our consumers, but we also want to have programs to help our consumers save money.

The other part of that bill that we touched upon, and the member from Toronto–Danforth did a great job, is the part where the transparency piece is being lost again. We've learned—we're talking about Ornge and we continue to talk about Ornge, which is something we have to bring to the public's attention—that when we don't have transparency where the public can ask questions at a regulatory board, there is a huge problem that this government is trying to hide. What is this government trying to hide? Why is this government trying to keep people in the dark?

People need answers, and there should be a clear path to get those answers when government money is being spent on any government program that is being delivered to the public.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I would just like to add additional comments regarding the good work that has been done in Ontario since 2003. We've spent so much money in rebuilding the whole system that now we're in a position of surplus energy. We went through a very hot summer. We didn't have too many smog events in Toronto. I'm not sure if there were any, but the smog was getting right up into our major parks in central Ontario at one time. So we did a great job.

Ontario puts out about 225 megatonnes of CO₂, and it's important to know that; 25 megatonnes was the reduction we got through closing our coal plants. We're almost there. It's extremely important.

What you're going to see in the next few days—in the next few days, it will be announced, but I got this from the Ministry of the Environment about one week ago—is that we have record-low ice areas in the Arctic, and not only a small change. The low before was about five million square kilometres; this year, it will be down to three million square kilometres of the Arctic sea ice. So we can see what's happening in our environment. The deniers of climate change are having less room to operate all the time. The evidence is coming out very clearly.

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So having more green energy in Ontario, having the nuclear energy around 50%, having as much hydro as we can develop—these are all good things. The planning is going to be better now because the IESO and the OPA will be joined into one new organization.

It's important. Our climate change is really happening. Just have a look at the Arctic sea ice extent. It is—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. Certainly, there's a lot of hot air but no energy here today. This government has mismanaged the energy file.

Let me refer you to a recent article that cites “a rural backlash against industrial wind farms.” They're blaming that for Samsung's failure to create promised renewable energy jobs, as they're contracted to do. The article notes that the plants in Tillsonburg, Toronto and Windsor that are designed to service wind and solar farms are not operating at capacity, while the London plant is delayed.

The minister is pointing fingers at anyone and everyone, as a matter of fact, for this government's failed energy plan.

Actually, it's quite absurd to blame public dissent when Samsung hasn't even chosen a location yet for the plant in London. With no local decision-making powers, how are these many local displays of frustration causing any delay for Samsung?

The town halls are certainly very effective in making Ontarians aware of the high cost of energy today, and the reasons, and how the Liberals have doubled hydro rates since taking office in 2003. But now the minister wants to further denigrate rural Ontarians and use them as his excuse for mismanaging the file.

We do know, of course, that excessive subsidies for wind and solar are the cause of our doubling of hydro rates, Speaker. When this government took office, hydro was 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour. Today, seniors and families pay 8.8 cents a kilowatt hour, and this government should be ashamed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Prince Edward–Hastings has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank everybody who chimed in, from Richmond Hill and London–Fanshawe, as well as Ottawa–Orléans, and my good friend from Nipissing, who has been excellent on the energy file since he was given that portfolio by Tim Hudak.

I do have to correct my record before I move on. When I was doing my critique on Bill 75, I mentioned that the Ontario Power Authority was created 15 years ago. But that swelling bureaucracy was actually created by this government in 2004, with 15 people on a transitional authority. So I would just like to point out that it was this government that created the OPA in 2004, and it has now grown to more than 275, with 80-some on the sunshine list. That's what happens with this government. They continue to create bureaucracy here in the energy sector. That's a perfect example.

We had a great debate in question period today about the LHINs and the CCACs and the fact that they have grown to enormous bureaucracies as well and need to be cut back. We need to be putting the money that's going into these middle layers of bureaucracy back into home care and health care, and that's the plan that the PC caucus has put forward. We need to eliminate bureaucracy and get back to providing the services that we require in the province.

The member from Nipissing pointed out, rightly so, that this government has watched as electricity rates have gone through the roof. We do have a real problem in the

province of Ontario in our energy sector, and our small business owners and operators see it every day when they open up their power bill.

I used to go in and put my elbow down on the counter at Stan's Grocery in downtown Bancroft and have a good chat with Stan. I don't do that anymore. Do you know why? Because Stan is out of business because of his soaring electricity rates.

We have to do more than what Bill 75 does. We have to fix it now.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm very happy to be able to rise today and speak to this bill, Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act, not necessarily because it's a superior bill, but because it is a very worthy discussion.

I'd like to take a moment to explain some of this act for those in my riding who may be watching this on TV, either now or later, because the cost of electricity is a major issue of concern in the north. In a nutshell, G75 proposes to merge the Independent Electricity System Operator, which is responsible for the day-to-day operations of Ontario's electricity grid, and the Ontario Power Authority, which is responsible for producing and coordinating that supply. Now, that is very much an oversimplification, but I did want to give a very general view of what we are discussing today.

These are two of the multiple agencies that were created when the Harris government attempted to privatize our system in the late 1990s and, in so doing, created a system of overlap and confusion that is not only very confusing but also very expensive. Of course, the five others are Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One, the Ontario Energy Board, the Ontario Electricity Financial Corporation, and the Electricity Safety Authority.

But it all boils down to one thing: Our energy bills are too high. Consumers don't care about the semantics about this organization or that organization. They want action on their hydro bills. We live in an era when the majority of the casework in my constituency office is around hydro bills, whether it's being unable to afford \$200, \$300, \$400 and sometimes even \$700 a month for electricity, or it's the pain and suffering that's caused by energy retailers who promised consumers relief and then gouged them for what seems to be every cent that people have.

Energy and hydro is the issue in my region, and it is the issue in my offices, and it's the issue for hard-working people who are struggling to pay their bills, because of the mismanagement of our system. That's why I'm very happy to speak to this bill today.

I would, of course, be remiss if I didn't take the time to thank two women in my riding for the outstanding work that they have done on this file. Kelly Getson and Becky Fediuk are two mothers from Minnitaki, just outside of Dryden, who became fed up with the way that things were going. They were tired of seeing their friends and family members who were unable to pay their hydro

bills. They were sick of seeing people living in poverty as a result of the skyrocketing monthly costs of their hydro bills. Kelly and Becky did something. They took action and they started the Facebook group Join the Fight Against Hydro One Rates.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment. I ask the members, if they are going to continue their conversation, to take it outside. It's very difficult to hear the speaker.

You may continue.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. These two women, Kelly and Becky, planned protests, they did media interviews, and they raised awareness of the problems associated with high hydro bills. I firmly believe that their actions made a difference because, for years, we had to listen to the government saying that hydro prices were not an issue. For years, we had an energy policy that spiralled out of control. For years, we had denials that hard-working families, pensioners and small businesses were being pushed to the brink because of rising hydro prices. And now we're here today.

It's true that the NDP has raised this issue for years, but we finally have an acknowledgement that the costs are out of control because this bill is in front of us, and in recent statements made by the minister.

I think it's fair to say that we should take a minute to thank Kelly and Becky, because we did not get to this point alone. So for that, I thank them very much. It's because of their hard work that there is finally this acknowledgement. Again, I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you on behalf of all of us who are fed up with rising electricity rates.

This bill is not the be-all and end-all. In fact, it can best be described as a very small step. It's a half measure. If anything, it's a symbolic half measure. It's no secret that this bill offers only a small part of what New Democrats have been pushing for.

It amalgamates two of the seven organizations that were created as a result of the dismantling of Ontario Hydro. New Democrats have pushed for all seven to be merged into not only a better-coordinated policy but to bring cost savings that will impact the consumer. Savings from this bill are expected to bring \$25 million in savings to the system annually. That's what the government's alleging. I don't know if that's actually the case, but they're throwing around that figure of \$25 million.

1730

This does lead me to the point. I want to point out that if we can save \$25 million from merging two, how much would we save from the merger of all seven? That's one of the improvements I would really like to see. Of course, it is more of a long-term strategy.

Just to contrast, this \$25 million that would be saved by the merger of these two bureaucracies—as of 2011, the amount spent on executive salaries for all the seven bureaucracies was \$14 million. That's Ontario Power Generation—these are just the top five executives. As of 2011, they made \$4 million. Hydro One: The top six

executives made \$3 million. The Ontario Power Authority: The top five executives made \$2 million. The Independent Electricity System Operator: The top six executives made \$2.5 million.

Interjection.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: The government is kind of vocal over there. It seems like they're not too happy with these numbers, but they're the ones who are enabling the system and allowing it to continue.

The Ontario Energy Board: The top eight executives made \$2 million. The Ontario Electricity Financial Corp. CEO—the one CEO—made \$560,000.

Let's contrast to Manitoba. Manitoba is a sore spot—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member for Peterborough to respect the speaker.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker.

I was about to say that Manitoba and the hydro prices charged in Manitoba are a sore spot for the people living in my riding because, for those of you who've looked at a map, you know that my riding is the most north and the most west, and it borders the Manitoba province. If you look at their rates, they are drastically, substantially lower than what we're paying here in Ontario. What's interesting is, if you look at how much they pay their top executive, it's \$375,000. To me, that is a good salary. That's well in excess of what people on average make in my riding, and I would imagine it's quite high compared to what the average salary is across the province. That is plenty. Why do we need to spend these millions of dollars on these executive salaries?

If we were to do that merger and if we weren't to just keep all those executives, that's \$14 million right there that we could save, on top of the \$25 million, not even factoring in all of the other efficiencies that we could get.

This bill will eliminate much of the overlap that currently exists between the two organizations. That said, we, as New Democrats, do have some concerns about the safeguards that currently exist, such as the Ontario Power Authority's power to develop an integrated power system plan and the Ontario Energy Board's power to review that plan for economic prudence, cost-effectiveness and regulatory compliance.

Many organizations have raised this concern about this change, and we hope to bring forward some amendments, if it makes it to committee; I'm not sure if it'll make it to committee or not. We'd like to see what kind of enhancements we can make.

The IPSP would be replaced by ministerial energy plans, and the minister must consult with the energy board in developing that plan. While the change more properly reflects the way that policy has been implemented, there are some concerns, once again, that this will limit input, and it could have negative repercussions.

When we talk about limiting input, that strikes me—just yesterday, and I believe earlier today, there was discussion about Bill 50, which is An Act to amend the Ambulance Act with respect to air ambulance services, and one of the themes of that bill is openness and

transparency. One of the things I raised yesterday was that it's not enough to raise openness and transparency in one act. If Ornge, if the Mississauga gas plant, if any of these things have taught us, we need to make sure that all legislation coming forward is transparent and is open.

Ultimately, our biggest concern is that this bill doesn't go far enough to consolidate the multiple agencies that exist. In failing to do so, it does leave a number of potential cost savings on the table.

One thing that it does not do—I see I'm really short on time, but I do want to mention it—is that it does not force municipalities to give up their municipally owned utilities, which is something that the minister has been pushing for and that we in the north have been fighting vehemently. So I'm quite pleased about that.

I have a whole bunch of other things I'd like to mention, but I've run out of time so I'll try to squeeze them into two-minute hits as I get them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Madam Speaker, in response to the comments made by the member from Prince Edward-Hastings about the price of electricity, I just want to bring a few points to the attention of this House and also the public. When his party was in office, they tried to sell, to privatize Ontario Power Generation, our electricity system, and then they failed. This failure caused the price of electricity—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me. Your comments are to be directed in response to the speech you just heard.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was talking about the price of electricity, that the price of electricity has risen by 30% in the past. Since we came into office, we brought in the Energy Consumer Protection Act, which basically controls the price of electricity.

In the past, our generation capacity decreased by 6% while demand increased by 8%, and that caused the government of the day to bring in diesel- and gas-powered generators. As a result, the price of electricity cost \$2.83 per kilowatt hour, and this basically cost the taxpayers over \$1 billion.

There are a couple of points I would like to mention about nuclear power, as the member from Toronto-Danforth touched base on the Darlington refurbishment. I must indicate that this project is going to create 25,000 jobs, and it's going to contribute to our economy in the amount of about \$5 billion per year. It's a major project.

Nuclear power in general, as the member knows, is an emissions-free source of electricity. It is safe, it's reliable, and we are dependent on that—not only us. There are 400 nuclear reactors in operation around the world. They are producing electricity—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much. I toast that, Speaker.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about some of the comments I've been hearing about Bill 75. We've got to

remember that the government is planning to merge the OPA and the IESO as what they purport to be a money-saving venture because they're focused on austerity here in the province of Ontario.

Let's remember it was this government that invented the OPA, conceived it, put it together, and talked about it being a virtual agency. You remember Bill 100, Speaker? Dwight Duncan was the Minister of Energy then. He said, "Bill 100 is going to create the OPA. This is going to be the answer to all of the electricity issues in the province of Ontario." He stood in his place right over there and he talked about how this was going to make the electricity system more efficient and more effective in the province of Ontario. All it was was a shield for the broken-down, bankrupt policies of this government, but to use the OPA to protect them from any kinds of criticism.

But here we know it is an absolute admission on their part that it has been a disaster. It started out as a virtual agency, was going to amount to a few people working in an office working on some plans for the future for the Ontario electrical system. It turned into a boondoggle of 240-some bureaucrats, costing the treasury hundreds of millions of dollars so far, and all it has done is presided over—along with this McGuinty government—the largest increases in the cost of electricity in the history of the world, here in Ontario—in the history of the world, over that period of time. Why? Because of a botched energy policy, and I'll talk more about that when I have a little more time, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Just responding to my colleague from Kenora–Rainy River, she brings up a great point. She lives in a riding in the northern part of Ontario, where hydro and electricity costs are of the most primal and most serious concern. It makes sense. It's an area where there are long, cold winters.

1740

I want to talk about two things in my two minutes. One is that this is clearly an example of a mistake that this government made—and they're correcting it, which is the right thing to do. I applaud you for correcting a mistake that was made.

There was another mistake that was made: the privatization of our electricity. That shouldn't have been done. The thought was that privatizing electricity would have made it more affordable. It was not more affordable. That was a serious mistake, and that also needs to be corrected.

I encourage you to correct your other mistake on the idea of energy and conservation. I think conservation is a way we can truly move towards really making more efficient use of our electricity.

In areas like Kenora–Rainy River where there are cold and long winters, it makes sense for us to use lots of electricity, because that is one of the sources of heating. But why is it that in places like Toronto, in places like southwestern Ontario, our electricity costs are higher in the summer, when we have warm, hot summers and long

hours of daylight? It makes no sense. We need to live in a way that's more sustainable. We can't be air-conditioning areas where we can live just fine with warm temperatures. It's a ludicrous idea, it's unsustainable, and it's not living in tune with nature. I haven't used the air conditioner in my house for six years; I have not turned it on once. I think we can move towards a society that's more sustainable if we learn to live in tune with nature instead of cranking up our air conditioners and cooling ourselves down. We don't need to.

Areas like Kenora–Rainy River: That's where we need to have heating, and that's where there are some costs that make sense.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The problem, when members are limited to only 10 minutes in their speeches, is that they don't have the time to canvass all the issues they would like to. I know that's the case for the member, because I know that there's intense interest in her part of the province in the question of why the NDP cancelled the Conawapa contract. There were some interesting negotiations going on with the province of Manitoba at the time. Someone will correct me, I'm sure—maybe Mr. Yakabuski will—but I think it was at something like 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour that they were willing to sell power from Manitoba to Ontario. The NDP government of the day, some members of whom still sit in the House, cancelled that contract which could have provided some very nice electricity—first of all, because it's more environmentally benign, it was hydroelectric power; and second, because the price was substantially lower than what could be arrived at today.

My friend from Timmins–James Bay, I'm sure, was pleading with them in the caucus of the NDP to proceed with the contract. I thought he would have been, because he would want low-priced, clean power coming into Ontario from an adjacent jurisdiction, which, by the way, has an NDP government.

So I'm very interested in the member for Kenora–Rainy River and whether she has questioned those in power at the time, some of whom sit in the NDP caucus today, on why they would have abandoned the lucrative-for-Ontario and good-for-Manitoba Conawapa contract with the province of Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Kenora–Rainy River has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker.

I have canvassed thousands of doorsteps, and I can honestly tell you that that issue has never come up. But what I can say is an issue—and it's a burning issue—is the fact that we can generate in the northwest some of the cheapest and cleanest electricity in all of North America. And what's particularly frustrating is that we are lumped in with the rates that are being charged to all of Ontario—those gigantic cost overruns of building all these nuclear plants with—let's talk about the debt retirement charge. We have to pay that, even though we aren't the recipients of the nuclear energy. It's frustrating

where we've seen our industries, whether it's a sawmill or a paper mill—mill after mill is closing down, when on the river they're able to generate electricity, some as low as 2.3 cents. So why and how is it acceptable for us to pay upwards of 10 cents a kilowatt hour?

What I wanted to talk about also is, when we're talking about making changes to energy in Ontario, I think there are two important financial considerations. First, there is definitely saving the public purse. There's finding greater efficiencies; absolutely. When we have a deficit that's in the tens of billions of dollars, we definitely have to consider that.

The other consideration is the pocketbooks of the public. What can we do to make things less expensive for everyday people? What can we do to bring down the costs on their hydro bills? I really can say that I don't think there's anything in this legislation that we're discussing here today that is going to have that effect on people's pocketbooks. I say that we can do more, and I challenge the government to do more.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act, 2012. As we've heard, this legislation proposes to amend the Electricity Act to allow for the merger of the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Power Authority. What bothers me about this bill is that we're headed down the same path as so much other legislation we've seen from this government. Since last fall, we've had an opportunity to debate several bills here in the Legislature. Time and again, the message from our caucus—and, I think, to some degree, the MPPs from the third party—is that these bills are designed to fool the people of the province into thinking that the McGuinty government is doing something. But the truth is that this bill and the others introduced won't actually do much for citizens of Ontario. Regrettably, despite some very serious challenges facing the province, the only legislation the government can come up with amounts to what I would say is window dressing. This government opposite has no plan. They've got no ideas about how to pull our province back on track, and as a result we're forced to debate bills like we did this morning and this afternoon.

When I go home when we're sitting and go to events like I did on the weekend, events like the Spencerville Fair, people come up to me and they talk about their costs of electricity. They talk about the skyrocketing costs that they're seeing on their energy bills. In fact, I'm sure that if I told my constituents that we're debating a bill that deals with the energy sector, they'd probably actually get excited; finally, they would think, this government is getting down to addressing the issues that are affecting those constituents and their families in their day-to-day lives. Unfortunately for the increasing number of folks in my riding dreading that hydro bill arrival, the fact that they don't even want to open their bill, this piece of legislation just isn't the answer to the problems that they're facing.

Like Bill 2 in this morning's debate, again I'm going to use the words "window dressing," because I think that's really what the government is trying to accomplish. I don't think this revelation is going to be a surprise to anybody in our caucus. After all, I think that this government is just spinning their wheels. I mentioned earlier this afternoon in my two-minute questions and comments that we struggled in the first session to get some committees in place; we still haven't got them, and we've been back three weeks. It's just, again, a disgrace that this government can't seem to get their legislative House in order and manage the minority.

I don't want members here to take my word for it. I want to quote from one of the members of my community, one of the industrialists who own and operate a manufacturing facility: Shelley Bacon, who is the president of Northern Cables. It's a company that is proud to call Brockville home. They also have a plant just down the road in Prescott as well. They began their operation in 1996 from people like Shelley and also former members of Phillips Cables, which had just closed. So they got together, a determined group, got their manufacturing licence and started Northern Cables. It's a company that I believe has been a great leader in its field. I think it's a great success story in Brockville and eastern Ontario, the fact that they started this company from the ashes of another, and now it's a major force in two cities in my riding.

1750

But, you know, when Shelley Bacon talks about a problem, I listen, Speaker. In fact, I was in fact so pleased that last month we had scheduled a chamber of commerce meeting with the member for Nipissing, who is our energy critic; he was going to come. Unfortunately, when the government created their crisis in education that they needed the PC Party to bail them out on, we had to cancel that chamber meeting. I know that the message that my friend from Nipissing had was one that my community really wanted to hear.

Back to Northern Cables and Bill 75: He really brought to my attention his energy bill, which shows this government's green energy boondoggle. The energy bill he gave me listed a surcharge, which is now the infamous global adjustment fee, which is basically Dalton McGuinty's green energy tax on businesses and homeowners. That one bill, Speaker, that he gave me was nearly \$12,000. It's \$5,000 higher than what they actually paid in electricity use. In one month, one company in my riding handed over nearly \$25,000 from their three sites.

To pay for the power that we're using on the grid is one thing, but no, this dollar figure was to pay for the failed green energy experiments of the McGuinty government. Between the actual cost of electricity and the global adjustment green energy tax, the site was billed almost \$18,500 for the kilowatt hours of electricity used.

You know, Speaker, 100 miles across the border in the United States power sells for three cents a kilowatt hour. I think that is something that anyone who operates a

manufacturing facility in eastern Ontario deals with. If you looked at what would happen across the border, they would have paid about \$8,100, so \$18,500 in Ontario and \$8,100 in the US.

Is Shelley Bacon going to be moving the plant? Absolutely not. He's committed to eastern Ontario, committed to Brockville. But again, his question to me is, what would a manufacturing company that wanted to locate in this province have to do when they looked at what benefits they would get in terms of the energy sector? This government really has its priorities out of whack when a company like that has that big a variance when it comes to power.

Every manufacturer probably got this letter from the St. Lawrence County Industrial Development Agency, over in Canton, New York. As one of their six reasons to come, they quote "Some of the lowest-cost and most reliable electricity in North America (50% less than you might be paying now)."

So if we're trying to create good private sector jobs, like we want over on this side of the House, we've got to get our energy sector in order. Things that you've put on people's bills like that global adjustment fee just drive more jobs across the border. It's sad.

Again, this bill tinkers around the edges. When you look at the bill, the Minister of Energy claims that it will save up to \$25 million a year by consolidating the IESO and the OPA. As the member for Nipissing noted in his leadoff debate on this bill, \$25 million is like a rounding error for this government. It's a shame the way that they've dealt with the price of energy. The savings would be erased in just two billing periods with the most recent rate increases that Ontarians have been hit with.

So I think it's fair to be concerned about the fact that this legislation basically creates a mega-agency by folding in the IESO and the OPA. We know the government's track record when it comes to creating agencies. We've sat here and debated eHealth and Ornge, and even the OPA itself—just a couple of examples that come to mind when you want to look at the McGuinty government, how not to create an agency. On this government's watch, and we've said it time and time again, the OPA has grown from a transitional, temporary 15-person body into this permanent 235-person agency that dominates the sunshine list. It's bad enough that in Bill 75 that takes place, but we've also removed some transparency and accountability by giving more power to the Minister of Energy. So I think we should all be concerned.

This government's track record, with its decision to scuttle the Mississauga and Oakville power plants, is going to cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. It's just another move, as we've said. It's the Liberal seat-saver plan, which continues to add costs to energy bills right across the province.

The last thing that the energy sector needs in this province is more political interference from the Minister of Energy. I think it goes the wrong way by creating this mega-agency. And you know what? It doesn't really matter, because we've got no committees for this bill to

go through. It's just, again, another disgrace on your government, plain and simple.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

The member for Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question, given by the Premier, concerning Ontario's economy.

Because it isn't 6 o'clock, we'll suspend the order until 6.

The House suspended proceedings from 1757 to 1800.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for London-Fanshawe has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities concerning post-secondary education.

You have up to five minutes to make your presentation.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I didn't want to be late for my own late show, so I'm glad I'm on time, rushing here.

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to explain the reasons behind my dissatisfaction with the response I received today in question period from the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to a question I posed about rising tuition costs in Ontario.

I raised the question today, in good faith, about an issue I hear within my community and across Ontario: the affordability of post-secondary education. My question was based on a new report issued today by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives called *Eduflation* and the High Cost of Learning—and "eduflation" is meant to be pronounced that way.

The report brings attention to the rising costs of education in Canada and the barrier this poses to attending post-secondary education. The report states that lower-income students are much less likely to attend university than high-income students, a testimony to that cost barrier that exists.

The report also indicates that post-secondary education is the least affordable in Ontario compared to all other provinces. The report goes on to say that even after the government's 30% tuition grant is taken into account, Ontario still will have the fourth-highest tuition costs in Canada for middle-income families, and the second highest for lower-income families.

I raised this question in good faith and hoped for a straight answer. Instead, the minister chose to attack my party's record from almost 20 years ago and make inaccurate statements about my party's platform for 2011. He said the NDP "in the last election, more recently,

didn't even have an education platform. The NDP platform on education was blank—nothing for universities, nothing for colleges, nothing for high schools." Speaker, that's not true. He also said, "Talk about putting students last. That's the party that puts students last." That was his quote.

The fact is that the NDP did put forward a clearly outlined platform on public education and post-secondary education in advance of the recent election—a platform that includes significant investments to put in place a four-year tuition freeze, an end to interest payments on student debt, and a number of other investments to improve access to and quality of public education. It's a shame that the minister chose to divert attention from the real issue I raised and instead engaged in a political attack against the third party.

I believe students and families who are struggling daily to pay for their university and college education really deserve better. They deserve the respect of the minister, as would have been shown by acknowledgement of the challenges they face in accessing post-secondary education and an honest commitment to make the situation better.

Speaker, that's my late show, and I'm looking forward to hearing the response.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. It is a pleasure to respond to the member from London—Fanshawe. I do appreciate her interest in post-secondary education and the affordability, accessibility and, of course, the quality that we have here in the province of Ontario. But the facts speak for themselves, and that's why I'm here today to answer some questions on issues that were raised today.

Between 2005 and 2010, we implemented what was called the Reaching Higher plan for post-secondary education at a cost of about \$6.2 billion, and any analysis will show that that has created more opportunities. It has increased student financial assistance and higher-quality student experience.

If we look in the province of Ontario, Speaker, last year 82% of our high school students earned their secondary school diploma. That's a jump of 14 percentage points since 2003. More and more of them are going on now, obviously, to college and university. We know, and I think the member would share this, that the key to a strong economy is having a highly skilled workforce. To have that highly skilled workforce, we need workers who can compete with the world and we need a world-class education system right here in Ontario, and I think we have that.

What I think the minister was getting at is that it's ironic that, when in government, the member's party cut student aid in half, and that simply is a fact that needs to be put out there. At a time when the affordability of education for Ontario students was not a question, they eliminated upfront grants. We have brought them back as a part of the process to improve this. When we were

bringing back the grants, we made sure that student voices were heard.

Last year, Ontario issued over \$1 billion in grants and loans. The number of college and university students that qualified for OSAP has increased by 77% since 2003. Any student that applies for OSAP is automatically considered now for 10 grants and loans, including the 30%-off tuition grant. Last year we promised we would support middle-class Ontario families, and we implemented a 30% undergraduate tuition grant. I'm happy to report that we were able to launch the on-line application for that on January 5 of this year, and we've had a huge take-up on it, Speaker. Last year, over 200,000 college and university students saw their costs reduced by 30% for the winter term. It has been indexed as well to reflect current tuition rates. That means that in 2012-13, students in a university or college degree program will save \$1,680 on tuition. Students in a college diploma or certificate program will save \$770.

Furthermore, Speaker, this government has committed to keeping student debt low, through the Ontario student opportunity grant. Debt is capped, under that program, at \$7,300 a year. It's a cap that has stayed pretty much the same since 2003, and it gives even more students non-repayable grants as OSAP becomes more generous.

All students also receive a six-month grace period after graduation in which no payments need to be made, and those who decide that their future may lie in the non-profit sector get an additional six months. No interest accumulates on Ontario student loans during that grace period. That plan is a payment relief program where the borrowers are not required to pay more than 20% of their family income towards loans. After 15 years, any remaining student loan debt is completely forgiven.

Speaker, the party that the member belongs to cut funding to our colleges and universities. We've increased funding to our post-secondary institutions by 81% since 2003. Post-secondary enrolment in the province is growing about five times faster than it did in the 1990s. The percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds attending college or university has increased by anywhere from 35% to 40% since 2003. We've increased the number of students attending colleges and universities and learning a trade by 210,000.

In closing, I want to thank the member for the question. I know it's sincere. The facts are that our government's commitment to education has made Ontario the province that has the highest post-secondary education participation rate in the western world, with one of the most generous tuition forgiveness programs in the country. I think that speaks volumes about the commitment of this government to making sure that we don't only have high-quality education at the post-secondary level but we also have affordable and accessible fees that go along with that, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to be debated, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1809.

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Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
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Yakubski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**First Session, 40th Parliament**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**Première session, 40^e législature**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)****Journal
des débats
(Hansard)****Wednesday 12 September 2012****Mercredi 12 septembre 2012**Speaker
Honourable Dave LevacPrésident
L'honorable Dave LevacClerk
Deborah DellerGreffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 12 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 12 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTHY HOMES RENOVATION TAX CREDIT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT POUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU LOGEMENT AXÉ SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 11, 2012, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit / *Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts en vue de mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt pour l'aménagement du logement axé sur le bien-être.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to complete my remarks from yesterday. I just want to put it into reference here. This Bill 2, which is the healthy homes renovation tax credit, is simply window dressing, as has been said by many. Others have used the term "half measures."

I think I've made reference to the logistics of it all. Technically, to renovate homes for seniors is a laudable idea, but in the context of what they're actually doing to seniors, it's even more troubling. They're not building any more long-term-care beds. They're now regulating retirement homes, which is a tax on seniors—when you move into a retirement home, there's this new tax of about \$15 a month—on top of the HST and home heating and all the other issues. Then there's home care. There's not enough time for home care. For my constituents, the biggest complaint I get is there's nothing in that home care envelope for them.

We have an aging population. They know it. Their strategy is called aging at home, but it's really aging alone, and this bill does nothing to help people. It really is simply window dressing.

There's a very scathing report that was issued a few days ago called *Falling Behind*. What it says here, in my last remarks, is that Ontario is the worst in Canada when it comes to growing poverty, increasing income inequity and financial support for public services. This is a coalition report.

This government has lost its way and seniors are paying the biggest price. These are the very people, our mothers and fathers, who built this country. So I can't support it in the extent that it's going forward, but I look forward to others' remarks.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: I am happy to rise and lend my voice to this debate. It's something that we know is good. We do think that seniors need help, but it's unfortunately just not enough. To be giving a tax credit on \$10,000 or less, if it may be, isn't going to help families who are already struggling. For families who don't have enough money to keep the hydro on, how are they going to come up with this extra money to make it work?

I know when I was campaigning in my riding and knocking on doors, I had seniors—one who had an oxygen mask on her face, and here she is with her grown son, who also can't live independently. How is something like this going to help that family? We need real, sincere things that are going to make a difference in a senior's life. How about our initiative to take the HST off home hydro? Things like that would be a serious effect to a senior's health, to their home life and to keeping them happy in their homes.

We have a lot of bigger issues than this small little bill would deal with. I just believe that we can do better, and I hope that this government will look at things that will do better and not just the little piece that's going to make them look good at the end of the day, saying that they're helping seniors with a new tax credit, because unfortunately it really is just not going to do enough for the seniors in my riding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It's my pleasure to rise again to speak about the healthy homes tax renovation credit. I've continued to speak on this and the importance of this bill in the context of our overall strategy to support seniors who wish to remain independent, at home, with dignity as they age.

A number of members opposite yesterday wanted to see the numbers, and I would just like to kindly refer them to Hansard last week where I spoke at length about the number of seniors, the tens of thousands of seniors we expect to benefit from this bill.

We also had a question from members opposite about the cost of this bill. I would refer them to the budget that contains the financial strategy for how this program will be funded.

I also want to take the opportunity to remind everybody in the House and everybody who's watching that this credit is not just for seniors who own or rent a dwelling, but it's for family members who perhaps have a parent or grandparent who want to apply for the healthy homes tax renovation credit.

Another myth I'd like to dispel is that the bill does not require that renovations be made of \$10,000; it's up to \$10,000 to receive a tax credit.

Again, the important thing is, this is part of a broader strategy. We've invested in more PSWs to help seniors at home; that's already happened. We have an aging strategy. We have an ongoing commitment for seniors who do need long-term care; that commitment continues. This strategy on the healthy homes tax renovation credit is to help people who want to stay at home to stay home as long as they can and age with dignity and grace.

Thank you very much. It's always a pleasure to get up and speak about this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I made a point of getting back here this morning to hear the rest of the speech of my colleague from Durham because it's always an enjoyable and riveting experience to be part of that. He touched upon a lot of things, as the member for Hamilton Centre did as well.

This government has wonderful words about how they're providing this or that or more for our seniors. But I can tell you in my constituency office, as the member from Durham talked about yesterday, every day we get more files opened and calls concerned about the inability to get that home care service that this government talks about providing so much of.

The bill is a whole lot of fancy words and verbal commitments, but the reality is that there's nothing there. The things that people need, the things that seniors need, are not being taken care of.

They come out with this tax credit for renovations to supposedly keep people at home. When the furnace is gone, it costs \$4,000 or \$5,000 to replace a furnace. This bill won't help them, won't help them at all. When they can't pay the hydro, this bill won't help them. When they can't pay their taxes, this bill won't help them. But no, if you've got the money to spend on a renovation to make it more disability accessible, "Oh, well, we're going to back you up on that."

This is about knocking off the dominos one at a time on the support issue, and when I say support, I talk about the political support. This is, one at a time, picking on this group or that group and saying, "Look what we're doing for you. Aren't we wonderful? My name is Dalton McGuinty. Don't forget me in the next election." That's the kind of stuff that's going on here with this bill, when there are real problems for seniors at home and they are not addressing them. That's what's missing here. What are you doing to address the real problems for seniors at home?

0910

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise. In Algoma-Manitoulin, this bill may help some. You know what? It may actually help a few more than some. It's a bill that makes a small contribution in terms of providing that financial assistance. Let's face it, not every senior out there, not every one of those households, has this \$10,000 to spend on their homes, or as my friend the member from across the way said, up to \$10,000.

Most seniors can't even afford their hydro bill at the end of the month. Most seniors are struggling, having problems affording their full complement of groceries and good, healthy food at the end of the month. That's where we should be putting a lot of our efforts and really providing them with the assistance they actually need.

A small step forward would actually be looking at endorsing the bill I proposed on the HST. That is something tangible they can put their teeth into that will give them the extra monies they need at the end of the month to meet their monthly requirements.

What we'd also like to see in this bill, which isn't in there, is that there is no domestic content requirement in terms of the procurement of either construction materials or medical assistive devices. We should look at making sure that is in there, that that is part of this bill. That is something that will definitely help seniors in our communities.

It really troubles me when we look at making that nice bullet—the headline—that makes the newspaper, where it says the government of the day is helping seniors. I agree with a lot of the comments the preceding member made, but we really need to look at how we can make this bill actually work so it can be beneficial to our seniors as a whole.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Durham has two minutes to reply.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to acknowledge and thank the members from Hamilton Mountain, Pickering-Scarborough East, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and Algoma-Manitoulin.

I would only say this: The common theme I heard is, it's too little too late—whether it's their heating bill, whether they can afford it or whether they can afford drugs that have gone up, the price of gas; just the common things.

But one thing that we—that's Tim Hudak and Andrea Horwath—agreed on together is that we acknowledge that one of the best and simplest things to implement would be to reduce the HST on home heating. It's doable, we agreed with it, it was in our election platform and the NDP agreed with it as well. That would be my message to the minister, if he's even interested in listening. But it seems that they have only one desire.

The HST itself is the biggest single burden on seniors today. Every single thing they get, whether it's physiotherapy, having their income tax done or buying gasoline,

it costs more—13% more on every single thing I've mentioned. So they take 13% right out of the pocket of every senior in Ontario. The price of gas—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order, order.

Mr. John O'Toole: I've touched a nerve.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. John O'Toole: They can respond if they wish, but here's the truth. Why is gasoline so expensive? Gasoline in itself is an example where it's now going to cost 8% more—8% more on gasoline alone. If gas is too expensive, eight cents of it is the HST, eight cents of it. Every single thing you buy or every service you get costs more in Ontario and you get less.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock, please.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I would ask that the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan withdraw his comments directed at my colleague from Durham, questioning whether or not my colleague was actually telling the truth. That is not allowed in this House, and I would ask the member to stand up and withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I will ask the member from Thunder Bay—you can shake your head and shrug your shoulders, but it won't help you. I'm asking you to calm it down a bit and don't make direct accusations if you can help it, okay? All right?

As far as ruling him out of order: I don't think it's a point of order. I will decide whether he's crossed the line or not. Thank you to the member from Renfrew. That's the end of that discussion.

Continue, member from Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 2, which the government named the healthy homes tax credit. It took me a while, Mr. Speaker, to figure out why they named it that, and then I realized that it was because the tax credit is only to help make the home healthier but not make it healthier for the people in the home. Because, in fact, as we go through the notes, we will find that the people who really needed that help to make the home healthier for them—it's really not available for them.

The government is trying to make people believe this bill will make it affordable for seniors who are struggling to stay in their homes, but that simply is not true. This bill gives seniors a tax credit of 15% on home renovations to a maximum of \$1,500 a year. That means the senior still is responsible for 85%. On renovations of \$10,000, the senior will have to pay \$8,500. Now if the renovation costs \$20,000, that will be over the maximum, and the senior will then have to pay \$18,500. For many seniors, Mr. Speaker, that's simply not an option.

Income levels have no impact on the amount of support that seniors would receive. So the wealthy senior who can already afford the renovations will be able to

use it; the senior who is living on modest means is not going to be able to benefit from that because they cannot come up with the 85%. For seniors who are already struggling to pay their bills, the 85% they are responsible for means that they still can't afford to renovate their homes. They can't afford to put in new accessible showers or ramps, no matter how much the government pretends otherwise.

In fact, at \$10,000, about half of the tax credit goes to cover the increased taxes on home renovations thanks to the Liberals' HST. Now, if the renovations cost \$20,000, the whole tax credit will go simply to cover the increased cost of the HST—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There are nine sidebars going on. I cannot hear the member, and he's right beside me. So I would suggest if you have any discussions you want to carry on, you know where you can go: out in the lobby. I don't want to have to warn you again. Thank you very much.

Mr. John Yakubuski: That's the end of that discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, it is.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, this was an election promise designed to distract people from the concerns about the rapidly increasing cost of living in Ontario. There was no real implementation plan.

Seniors on fixed incomes are among those people who have been hardest hit by the government's policies that are leading to spiralling hydro costs, increased taxes and families having less and less money left at the end of every month. The HST increased the cost of hundreds of items and services, including many of those that seniors rely on to stay in their homes, such as snow removal, firewood and lawn maintenance. It also cut into their incomes by increasing the taxes on everything from magazines and vitamins to haircuts. It forced the cost of hydro up 8%, in addition to all the increases caused by this government's extensive green energy experiments. In fact, this government's own documents revealed that the cost of energy is set to go up 46%. I've heard from many seniors in my riding that the cost of hydro is making it unaffordable to stay in their homes.

And it seems the government continues to hit seniors with extra costs every time they turn around, such as increasing the fees of driver's licences and vehicle plate stickers. For seniors in many areas of my riding, the ability to stay in their home requires that they still be able to drive, but with these increased costs and increasing insurance, this simply is becoming more and more of a challenge.

This tax credit won't address these problems. It won't help the struggling senior who needs the support the most. It's really just a public relations exercise to make it look like this government is doing something. The seniors in my riding, Mr. Speaker, are smarter than that.

0920

If the government really believed that this tax credit was to provide a significant benefit to seniors, they

would have brought this bill forward for debate more often last fall and this spring, instead of choosing other priorities. Mr. Speaker, this bill was introduced as bill number 2, the first one after the election. Here we are today, almost a year later, and we're still debating the same bill. If they really believed it was going to make a difference, we would have been debating it two weeks ago, instead of spending two and a half hours debating a motion on full-day kindergarten which doesn't make any legislative changes. It makes you wonder whether introducing this right away when they were re-elected had more to do with public relations and pretending to care for seniors than actually doing something to help our seniors.

There are many things that we should be doing to help our seniors. We need to look at long-term-care homes. We need to look at home care. We need to stop the spiraling cost of living so they can actually afford to stay in their homes, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, if this bill actually assisted low-income seniors, like this government claims, they would have created a new problem for the very people this bill was supposed to help. Last year, when he was on the campaign trail, the Premier told seniors to go ahead and spend the money for the renovations, because anything from October 1 onwards would be covered. When the Liberals introduced the bill, they included a clause to make it retroactive to October 1, 2011, but they haven't made the bill a priority. They didn't warn those seniors that almost a year after they spent the money, the bill still wouldn't be passed. Very few low-income seniors can afford to do renovations not knowing whether they would qualify and having to wait a year for the money, so having it retroactive to last year is really only benefitting those who can already afford to do the renovations.

You remember during the campaign that the Premier said he was implementing this tax credit early because of the concerns with our economy. He predicted that implementing it early would create the demand for more skilled jobs. The media reported, "At a campaign stop in Pickering on Thursday, McGuinty promised to roll out a tax credit for home renovations 15 months early in an effort to stir up new jobs." Although the articles described the Premier being asked about the jobs, "He couldn't say how many more jobs will come from applying the credit to renovations starting October 1 instead of the original rollout" date. So there was absolutely no plan or no projections done on what the benefit of moving it up 15 months would be. If he didn't know what was going to happen in the first months, I expect he had absolutely no information on what was going to happen after the 15 months either.

If moving the start date up to October was going to have such a big impact on the economy and the lives of our seniors, why is it that, almost 10 months after introducing the bill, we are here debating it today? If he was so worried about the economy, and this bill was going to make a difference, why didn't the government bring forward this bill for debate more often? Once again, it

shows this bill is about public relations. It isn't really about helping our seniors or creating jobs. In fact, it has become clear that the Liberals still do not have a jobs plan.

Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of the warning to always check the fine print. In fact, the people of Ontario have discovered that is always a good policy with Liberal campaign promises, because many of them appear to be more about good public relations than good policy. If they are delivered at all, they aren't quite what the people were led to believe they were getting, just like the Liberals' commitment in the last election when they promised to create one-window access for our farmers. That, a year later, still has not been done. Now, when you ask the Minister of Agriculture about that, he says he believes in a no-wrong-window approach. Mr. Speaker, and I ask you and all the members of this House what that could mean: no-wrong-window approach.

Of course, there was the famous campaign promise in 2003, when McGuinty looked Ontario voters in the eye and said, "I won't cut your taxes, but I won't raise them either." He then proceeded to introduce the health tax, the HST, and cancelled the planned corporate tax decreases.

On this side of the House, we take a different approach. We believe that, rather than implementing a tax credit that barely covers the sales tax, the government would be better to look at policy that actually improves the lives of our seniors, to make it so they don't need to be afraid every time their hydro bill arrives, to make it so they feel their government works for them instead of tying them up in red tape and continually hitting them with additional costs. We believe that a government should have a real jobs plan. We believe that governing a province should be about good policy, not just good public relations. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me a few moments to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to rise today to talk about the healthy homes renovation tax credit bill that is here before us.

The purpose of this bill that the Liberal Party has brought over is that they're trying to meet one of the major planks they had in their platform last election, and that's to assist seniors. So in bringing this bill forward, their intent is to keep seniors—those who have health issues and might need aids or home renovations in order to remain there—in their homes longer. So we agree with the intent of the bill.

The other part of the bill is that they're saying they're going to create 10,500 more jobs to stimulate the economy. But as my colleague said earlier, there's no clause in there for procurement, a buy Ontario policy, or also to assist seniors with small medical devices they might need. They might not need a whole bathroom, but they might need a handrail in the bathroom, and they may have to ask a contractor to install that. That also costs extra money. When you look at the small amount they may have to spend, which is a lot to seniors because

they're on a fixed income—a lot of seniors are women who are living in poverty—they don't even have that small amount to pay. And if they do, they're going to get a very tiny tax credit on that.

The beauty of the bill—and it's not so good-looking once you look at it; it's kind of very distasteful—is that you have to spend at least \$10,000, and most seniors who are struggling today do not have \$10,000—

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Up to.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:—up to—to recover up to \$1,500.

I understand the intent of the bill, but it's not going to help seniors who really need it, who are in poverty and are on such fixed incomes. They can't even make those small renovations, let alone up to \$10,000. So the intent is there, but this bill really doesn't go far enough to help the seniors who truly need help to stay in their homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes. I think it's really important to recognize some key facts.

Yes, it is true that this was part of our party's election platform, and I'm really proud that the first thing we did after getting elected as a government was to fulfill that campaign commitment. I think that's a good thing, and people did vote for this party as a government to ensure that the promises made in the campaign were fulfilled.

The second important point to talk about is that it's not a commitment that somebody has to spend at least \$10,000; it's up to \$10,000. Somebody can spend \$1, \$2, \$10,000, \$500, and they will get a certain portion back for making their homes more affordable. I've spoken in this House many times—if you go to a Home Hardware, as my friend the member from Peterborough likes to talk about, or to Conval-Aid, which is a very specialized business in my community in Ottawa that provides equipment for seniors, these things—for example, an elevator or chair lift costs about \$4,000 with installation, and 15% is a significant saving on those type of things.

To the member for Oxford's comments, yes, healthy homes result in healthy families. We want to make sure our seniors continue to live at home if they have a home and they're living in their home. That's a good thing. That will allow them to ensure they have independent dignity. If you speak to any senior, they'll tell you they don't want to be in a long-term-care facility, they don't want to be in a retirement home, they don't want to live with their loved ones. They want to live independently in their home. It is incumbent on us to take every opportunity, every step to facilitate that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak about this yet again.

We on this side of the House have said over and over that this bill is tinkering at the edges. Our member from—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Oxford.

Mr. Victor Fedeli:—Oxford eloquently said this morning that this is morning dressing. What the pressing issues really are, Speaker, are about the 600,000 men and women who woke up this morning without a job.

0930

Now, it's interesting in Ontario. We have a dichotomy happening here. Two weeks ago Friday, I visited Central Welding in North Bay, a long-time family-owned business, and the owner and his son Erik Thomsen brought me through the facility on Friday. The one problem that they shared with me is they cannot find skilled workers in Ontario. That's the kind of issue we should be addressing here. Central Welding, who would like to expand, who build bridges and steel structures all over the world, cannot find skilled trades in our city, yet we have high unemployment in Ontario, 600,000 men and women. We have a disconnect between the people who are looking for work and the companies that need workers.

On Sunday night, I went to the Eid dinner in North Bay, and at the table I sat with two young men who I'd never met there before, and they explained to me they are brand new to North Bay. They moved here Friday. They are welders who moved here from Tunisia to work at yet another steel manufacturing company in North Bay. Business is very good for those companies if they were able to find the employees. We have a disconnect between the 600,000 who are not working in Ontario and those companies who are looking for men and women.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Miss Monique Taylor: Again, I'm pleased to be able to stand to add a few more comments to this debate, because I've been sitting here going through my stuff and recollecting so far back when we originally started this debate.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: A very long time ago.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, it's been a while. So it came back to me: This is another one of those Liberal initiatives that if people have money, they'll be rewarded; they'll get the money back. People who don't have money are not going to be able to use this tax credit. We need to come up with things that maybe—loaning the money up front for people who need it might be helpful. It would be easier for them to then pay back small loans, because we know we're not getting anything for free.

The NDP had come out with real solutions in their campaign for assisting seniors: solutions like more hours into home care, programs for home maintenance, cutting the grass, shovelling snow, getting groceries. These are the things that are really going to affect a senior's life. These are the things that they're struggling with. If a senior isn't able to shovel their snow in Hamilton, bylaw's going to show up not knowing that it's a senior—not that it matters, because they didn't shovel their snow. What's going to happen? They're going to get a ticket from bylaw for not cleaning their sidewalks.

These are the kinds of things that seniors struggle with, and they're things that I heard on a daily basis

before I was elected to this office. So we need more. This bill certainly isn't going to do it. We need to make sure that we're taking care of seniors in a proper way, where they actually can stay in their homes, because saying that the rich people can stay in their homes and people who can't afford it can't is a two-tier system for our seniors, and not exactly what Ontarians deserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Oxford has two minutes.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members from London-Fanshawe, Ottawa Centre, Nipissing and Hamilton Mountain for their comments to my presentation.

I just want to point out that the member from Ottawa Centre I think pointed out the essence of my, shall we say, opposition to this bill when he said that this was an election promise of a year ago and nothing has been done yet, but he's very proud of the fact that we're now working on it. I think this is the way that they look at it. They don't understand that the problem with the bill is that it was intended to help people who couldn't afford the total cost of doing it themselves, but if we are debating that bill today, all those people were not able to implement anything because they needed approval for it. It wasn't good enough, because the Premier's word is not considered that good in the province, when he said, "Don't worry about it. We're going to introduce it. We're going to make it retroactive." So they couldn't afford to put their name on the bill of lading when they delivered the product because they didn't know when they were going to get the money, or if their application would even be approved.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of exceptions in this bill of what doesn't qualify for the tax credit. So people who could not afford it upfront and needed that to make it happen, they had absolutely no way of knowing that they would be eligible, so they are still waiting to make the application. All the applications, all the jobs that have been done—if any have been done on this program—are being done by people who could afford to do it without the tax credit.

So I think the money would have been much better spent on things like reducing the cost of living in Ontario, so these people could pay their hydro bills and stay in their own homes. They could pay for their other services they need around the home, as I mentioned in my remarks, and have to pay 8% more because of the HST. If, instead of a healthy homes tax credit, they would have made it a healthy seniors tax credit, they could get a tax credit for some of the things they have extra costs on because of this government's actions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased today to rise today to give comments on the healthy homes renovation tax credit, Bill 2. I will emphasize that it was brought in a long, long time ago, and we're still discussing Bill 2, but the government controls that agenda.

My riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock is home to an increasingly large number of seniors. In fact, according to the most recent census data, which is available from Statistics Canada, nearly 20% of the population of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock is over the age of 65; this compares to a provincial level of 13%. So not only does my riding have a naturally aging population, but we are also experiencing an influx of seniors from the greater Toronto area, who have decided to retire to the beauty of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Consequently, I have a keen interest in legislation which may be of benefit to my seniors—a very small group of my seniors. But anyway, that is the problem with this bill: It benefits a very small segment of the over-65 population. The bill is designated to provide financial assistance to seniors who want to renovate their homes in order to make them more compatible with their aging lifestyle, thereby allowing them to stay in their homes for as long as possible. I can't argue with that; it sounds good.

However, the lofty goal is about as far as it goes. The legislation requires that a senior must spend at least \$10,000 on certain home renovations pertaining to mobility, functionality and accessibility, which are not covered by any other program. So the renovation cannot be designed in any way to enhance the value of the property or it would be disqualified. A senior spending \$10,000 on these types of renovations would receive a tax credit of \$1,500. Sounds like a good deal. There's only one problem: The median income for seniors in this province is \$25,000 for a single and \$45,000 for a couple. This is the income bracket for the majority of seniors in Ontario. That's just the way it is. So let's look at that. A widow making \$25,000 who wants to modify her home to make it wheelchair accessible so she can continue to live in it would have to fork over 40% of her annual income in order to qualify for this tax credit. That's pretty heavy. Are you kidding me? Who's going to be doing that?

I said earlier that my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock had a growing seniors population. In fact, the percentage of residents over the age of 65 is 46% higher in my riding than in Ontario as a whole. This is another bit of data from Statistics Canada that is equally interesting: The median household income in my riding is more than 12% below the provincial average. Consequently, a disproportionate percentage of my seniors are going to be at or around that \$25,000-a-year median income. Realistically, how big a deal is the healthy homes renovation tax credit going to be for the vast majority of seniors living in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock?

I haven't heard of any senior centres in Lindsay, Bobcaygeon or Fenelon Falls planning healthy homes renovation tax credit parties or festivals. None of the seniors' clubs in Haliburton or Beaverton or Peterborough county are organizing parades, street dances or fireworks to celebrate the passage of this bill. So when I sit down with the "old boys," if I can use that phrase, who gather every

morning at their local Tim Hortons, I can assure this House that the healthy homes renovation tax credit is not the primary topic of conversation. In fact, this bill is a non-event for most seniors in my riding.

0940

The seniors whom I deal with are more interested in how they're going to pay their hydro bills, the essential services they need in their lives. This past winter, many of them called my office for help in stopping OPG from disconnecting their electricity and plunging them into cold and darkness. Many seniors are struggling to pay their outrageous hydro bills, which this government has brought down on them like a plague. It is the number one issue in my constituency office, and I've said that time and time again. Once they scrape the money together to pay for their hydro, they're often left in a quandary in terms of buying food. God forbid that they would want to waste the little money they have left on buying a present for a grandchild. Has this government been listening to any of this? Because it certainly doesn't look like it to me.

Very few Liberal members represent rural or small-town ridings, and I truly believe that they have totally lost touch with what is going on across the province. The impact which the McGuinty government's green energy program has had on rural Ontario has been terrible; scandalous. People have to leave their homes; it's that serious. Citizens' groups have sprung up across the province to fight the continued proliferation of industrial wind turbines near schools and residential areas. Dozens of municipalities across Ontario have passed motions demanding that wind turbine projects not be approved since the government silenced them from the approval process. Homeowners, including many seniors, have seen the value of their properties go down as a result of the wind turbines and solar farms; that's not helping seniors. Yet, this government doesn't acknowledge any of that. We repeat it and repeat it, bring motions and bring private members' bills, and it just continues its relentless pursuit of green energy despite the human costs.

It reminds me of the Death Star in Star Wars wreaking havoc and destruction in its path as it makes its way relentlessly across the galaxy. However, when the good citizens of the Liberal-held ridings of Scarborough objected to a string of industrial wind turbines across the shores of Lake Ontario, the McGuinty government's ears perked up. The McGuinty government sure heard the voices of the seniors who live in those communities.

What this government has done to seniors and lower-income people across the province is nothing short of outrageous. They talk a good game, but their actions demonstrate they're really not interested in addressing the very real problems of seniors and low-income Ontarians.

The member from Hamilton Mountain has said many times in the House, and said again this morning, that they're not addressing the little things that keep seniors in their houses. Shovelling the walkways, more home care: That is what the seniors are screaming for. Bringing in a

piece of legislation like this will do absolutely nothing for the average senior in this province.

I have no doubt that the members for St. Paul's and Toronto Centre will have parks named after them by the grateful seniors of Forest Hill and Rosedale when they use their \$1,500 tax credits towards redecorating their condos in Fort Myers and Clearwater. This is a feel-good bill for them. It makes the Premier feel good while doing almost nothing for the people of this province who look to their leaders for help.

Last November, the PC caucus supported a private member's bill sponsored by the NDP which would have removed the provincial portion of the HST from home heating bills. That bill wasn't a panacea, but it was a definite step in the right direction. That is why my colleagues and I supported it during second reading, and it passed. Bill 4 passed second reading on November 24 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

Maybe I was away, but I don't recall that bill ever being referred to committee yet. I don't think it has been—no?—let alone being brought back to this House for third reading. That bill would have benefited all seniors, not just the affluent seniors that the McGuinty government seems to be more concerned about. Where was the social conscience of the McGuinty government then? They really don't have one.

Seniors in this province don't need gimmicks like this bill; they need a resolution to their astronomical hydro rates and heating rates. They're having a crippling effect on them. They need the government to take a deep breath and rethink its disastrous green energy policies, which have hurt countless seniors, families and businesses across the province. The McGuinty government needs to get serious about fixing the growing problems in health care if it truly wants to help seniors. It needs to get its financial house in order, to bring government spending under control through such measures as a legislated, across-the-board public sector wage freeze. It needs to haul in the obscene waste of taxpayers' dollars through a string of scandals at such enterprises as Ornge, Samsung, the Mississauga power plant cancellation and the notorious eHealth boondoggle.

It needs to get serious about job creation by accepting PC policy reforms that would update outdated apprenticeship programs, which would generate thousands upon thousands of skilled tradesmen to fill much-needed voids in their economy. I could go on and on. It would be great if more of the young people could access it, but the ratios need to change so more can access it.

Fixing the finances of the province, getting serious about job creation and lowering corporate taxes to stimulate a reinvestment in research, innovation and hiring are the ways to help seniors and all hard-working people of Ontario, because they'd have more money to spend on health care and education. When the deficit bills and debt bills come in as the third-largest budget item, we are not able to help health care and education.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Once again, this has been a long debate on this bill, and here we are again, still debating it. It's a wonderful, feel-good, fuzzy-wuzzy-feeling bill. We will more than likely be supporting this. I know some of the seniors in my area will be very, very active in pursuing this bill, but overall, it won't be addressing the mass that we need.

I just wanted to make a comment on the member from Ottawa Centre, who clarified the point that my member said earlier, that they can spend up to \$10,000, and you're absolutely right. The bill doesn't require—if you spend \$2,000, you can get a credit on the \$2,000 that you're spending. You're absolutely right. But even the \$2,000—not many individuals have that—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, folks, certainly the decibel level's going up, especially in that corner down there and a couple of sidebars over here. I cannot hear the member at the back. I would suggest, if you want to have a group session, you go outside. All right? That would be much appreciated.

Continue.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I just wanted to clarify that point: Not too many people have that \$10,000 to spend, or the \$2,000, let alone \$200. That's a reality that seniors are facing in this province.

The member from Pickering–Scarborough East, in her earlier debate, also talked about how this is going to be creating a wealth of jobs. It will, some, but it won't in the majority, because there won't be that many seniors that will be able to take advantage of this program. Let's face it: This is, again, a fuzzy-wuzzy, feel-good, lovey-dovey bill.

I want to comment on the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. You made a very good, eloquent point in regard to how this is going to benefit your area, and I feel a lot of what you have in your area in Algoma–Manitoulin.

Unfortunately, I didn't get to the point that I wanted to make in regard to—and I will make it the next time, Mr. Speaker, when the clock comes around the second time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks very much. Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to debate again today and talk about this Bill 2, the healthy homes renovation tax credit.

I had the opportunity to give a 20-minute presentation on this legislation a week ago, and I must say, my concerns are still the same. This is a piece of legislation that was the second-most important act by this government after it was elected. The first, of course, we know, is the ancient parliamentary right bill that is placed before the House; that stays on the order paper until it prorogues.

This bill was, obviously, the first piece of public policy that this government decided to put forward. They did it over 10 months ago, and 10 months later, here we are. It took us an unprecedented two weeks to put forward legislation, Bill 115, on a province-wide wage

freeze for educational professionals, and here we are, 10 months later, and what they will consider a signature piece of their financial plan for seniors still hasn't passed because they don't have the will to do it. It is more about public relations than it is about public policy.

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This is a very interesting trend—an unhelpful one, nonetheless—with this government. I think that it's important for those who are watching this debate at home to recognize that, whatever they're saying from the Liberal Party on this piece of legislation, it is not met with absolute conviction. Why? Because it took them 10 months to come to this point and arrive at this point to talk about a bill that they're not intending to pass.

Speaker, I'm pleased again to be able to support my Progressive Conservative colleagues in opposing this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The Minister of Energy.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister of the Environment, sorry.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I've been given some additional responsibility.

What—I won't say amazes me—surprises me a bit is the degree of negativity that we have toward a bill that I think is a very significant step forward in terms of providing services for seniors. I recognize that in the best of all worlds, when there's unlimited money available, you may want to expand programs of this kind.

I've been reading two books that my friend in the front benches of the NDP would be interested in: *Minding the Public Purse*, by the NDP Minister of Finance in Saskatchewan, and another by Thomas Walkom about the days of the NDP in the province of Ontario. There was a recognition at that time—I'll put it in the context of this bill—that there were major economic challenges. When governments want to move forward, when they have to take certain action, sometimes they have to do it in a more modest way than otherwise would be the case.

I hear particularly some of my friends, and the speaker whose remarks we are addressing, calling for more spending in this area. Yet during at least the first two thirds of question period, they were up demanding that the government spend less money. But when they get into debate in the morning—perhaps when not everybody is watching television—they're demanding that the government spend even more money and that it be an expanded program.

I think this is a significant step forward. I am flummoxed by the fact that the Legislature has not passed this bill rather quickly. But the opposition has chosen, as is their right, to take a long time in dealing with the bill, which they keep telling us is a relatively routine bill. So I'm looking forward to approval of this in the very near future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think the analysis by the Minister of the Environment is fairly accurate. The good thing about what Liberals are saying today that they weren't saying four or five years ago with their bills—with their bills, they used to say, "This is historic," as if it were really revolutionary. They're not saying that anymore about the picayune little bills that they introduce. So at least they now talk modestly about measures that might help some people.

I have to admit that the analysis of the Tories is quite correct, because it's similar to ours, except the answers to these questions are radically different, as you might imagine.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh. I can't get over that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The member from Ottawa—Nepean would agree with that, I'm assuming.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: No.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No? Because the Tories say we are not doing very much for seniors—and they're quite right—and presumably that they have the right position on seniors. Yet if you look historically at what her previous regime did, they decimated the Ontario population, both young and old. They cut \$13 billion of corporate taxes, thus reducing our province to so very little that we had nothing for seniors, nothing for children, nothing for anyone. In fact, in a great economy, they left us with a \$5-billion deficit. So the Tories have little to teach us by way of what we can learn from the past. This is true.

This is a little bill, and it will benefit a few people. We argue about 1% of the population will benefit, and these are the one-percenters, the very, very wealthy. I know the Minister of the Environment may not like that part of it. I suspect he—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But he's right. It will help some people, and we should get on with it; it doesn't do very much for the majority of seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock has two minutes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the input from my colleagues from all sides. I think that as people get older, the last thing they want to do is be dependent on their families or their government. The McGuinty government has made such a mess of the economy that their families are hurting also and, may I say, the hydro bills, the home heating bills—the cost of living is going through the roof. So their families are struggling with the fact that when their seniors, their parents or grandparents, can't stay in their own homes because of bad policy, the high cost of living, high energy, high heat, they have to struggle even to help them. Does that help the seniors population stay in dignity, help them stay in their own homes a little longer if they could afford to? It doesn't.

You see a piece of legislation brought in that helps such a minuscule number of seniors, when the government could change the approach of how they help seniors

in a more holistic way of more home care services. They can do that all within the ministries' budgets that they do have. They need to reallocate. There is tons of wasteful spending within these ministries. So let's step back and say, how do we really help seniors stay at home?

This piece of legislation, the healthy homes renovation tax credit—well, as my colleague from Oxford said, it might be healthy for the home but it's really not helping the senior stay within the home. So we aren't giving constructive criticism, saying, "Nice title"—it helps a very small group of seniors. I gave the statistics from my riding of how few seniors are going to be helped. Let's get to some real meat of the matter in trying to help the seniors stay at home.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It's a pleasure to rise this morning to comment on Bill 2, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a healthy homes renovation tax credit. As some of my colleagues have noted, this legislation has been with us for some time now. It has returned from committee, much like we recently came back to the Legislature from the House summer hiatus, and, as in that case, you're tempted to say, "Look at you. You've hardly changed a bit."

As viewers will know, there isn't as much of a crackle in the air about Bill 2 as there was when the House was called back earlier; there's not much in the way of electricity in the air, maybe because this bill was introduced nearly 10 months ago and we're only now getting around to third reading. Project overrun, I guess; it happens.

It's hard to find skilled tradespeople when they keep leaving the province for opportunity in other jurisdictions. In any event, here we are again debating the healthy homes renovation tax credit, a bill that proposes to allow seniors to claim a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 for expenses related to permanent modifications to their homes: the kind of changes that would make it easier to live in their place; the kind of changes, if I understand the legislation correctly, that would improve their home without adding value to it; the kind of changes that presumably the next homeowners won't see as a value added; the kind of features they might even pay a contra to remove.

I understand that this kind of behaviour is intended to avoid government subsidizing things like hot tubs, saunas and pools, but the wording still strikes me as a little strange. To recap, Bill 2 would offer a 15% rebate on home renovations up to \$10,000. You would still have to pay the HST, of course, and you would have to wait until the tax cycle to recover your credit. But you would be in line to receive anywhere from \$1 on a \$50 home renovation, to \$200 on a \$10,000 home renovation.

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Like many members on this side of the House, I have my doubts about the number of seniors with a spare \$10,000 kicking around to take advantage of an offer like this. In my constituency office, seniors aren't calling up, asking why the government won't make it easier for them

to install grip bars in their bathroom; they're coming in and calling around with much more pressing and serious concerns. They often end up at the end of their rope, and when they call up their elected representative, it is because they are at their last resort. These are people who are discouraged, distraught and desperate, people struggling to retain their dignity as they plead for help.

What does Bill 2 do for them? How does it help them live a better life in the house they chose to spend their golden years in? It really doesn't. We're now seeing seniors forced by cruel circumstances into working long into what are supposed to be the retirement years. People joke about Freedom 75, but nobody is really laughing. They're choking back tears and anger.

The vast majority of seniors can't afford a \$10,000 renovation, and those that can don't need the modest tax credit that this bill is offering. It's smoke and mirrors. The truth is, really, that most Ontarian seniors are making choices between which bills get paid this month. They're scrambling to pay monstrous hydro bills and struggling to understand why their heating bill has doubled since 2003. They're justifiably shocked to hear about the gold-plated FIT energy rates. They're simply appalled at the \$190-million bill for the cancellation of the Mississauga power plant. They are connecting the dots.

They're wrestling with medical expenses and pharmacy costs. If the government really wanted to help Ontario's seniors and had the political will to strap together a \$60-million short-term money allocation, we could do much better than Bill 2.

Some three quarters of the seniors in this province see their hydro bills as unaffordable, so I don't quite understand how those same seniors can dig under the couch cushions to find money for a substantial home renovation. Where are you going to find the \$10,000 that you have to borrow? Where is the sense in expecting people to borrow \$10,000 to foot the cost of a home renovation when those same people can barely pay their bills?

Most people look at Bill 2 and are saddened by the sobering reality that after helping to raise this province to greatness, mind you, they are left in a situation where they are unable to spend \$10,000 on their home. They simply don't have that type of disposable income. It boils down to this: Wealthier seniors will do renovations whether we incent them or not. Poor ones have more pressing concerns than walk-in tubs or chair lifts.

This is a very modest, very slender bill that benefits at best a sliver of the population. We've heard about 380,000 people aged 65-plus that this bill is supposedly going to help, but this government's own stats show around 1.89 million Ontarians aged 65 or over, so 80% of seniors are being left out in the cold with this bill.

Bill 2 was the chalk outline of a good intention, so on the whole, I'm not really sure how much merit to attach to it. This is mainly a window-dressing bill for the Liberals. Like the tuition reduction for post-secondary students, it speaks to a personality tic, a well-documented history of picking and choosing small-target demographics for political reasons.

I'm not really sure what the government is up to by bringing it forward, especially the way that it has. This has gone to committee and returned for third reading. Then, rather than promptly put it to a vote, they decide to make it a bit player in the by-election drama. It has been taking up space on the stage here so that the minority government can avoid the business at hand, the responsibility of the minority government of seriously working with the members of this side of the House, using our best ideas to improve this province.

This is another piece of legislation that is constructed not out of caring but out of calculation. It's designed to do a great deal of good for the optics and interests of the Liberals. This isn't about helping seniors live in their homes longer; it is about doing what helps to make the party opposite hold on to that side of the House a while longer.

What I'm hearing from Ontarians is that there is indeed a growing appetite for renovation. We've heard the government say that the program costs for the tax credit would be offset in other areas, and when we hear that the costs for this initiative will be carried by others, what we're hearing is the story of the opportunity costs.

What would we be able to do with our time here as legislators, with our resources as provincial government, if we weren't dealing with this foot-dragging filibuster? What if we actually addressed the kind of pocketbook concerns that have a real, immediate, cumulative and on-going effect on the health, welfare and quality of life of seniors in Ontario?

What if, instead of the PR-centric Bill 2, this government had sped Bill 4 through committee and back to third reading? If the government considered seniors' concerns to be truly a priority, it could see Bill 4, the HST rebate for home heating, stickhandled through the House and into law by Thanksgiving. They could sort out the committees, sending it back out into the House for third reading, and do some good for Ontario seniors before the sub-zero temperatures set in.

We have already had some cold nights this week, and furnaces will come on again. The radiators will be warming up here at Queen's Park, and the hydro bills in Ontario mailboxes will send chills down spines. Instead, that bill will probably celebrate its first anniversary, its first birthday, stalled out in committee, yet it was introduced the same day as Bill 2.

We should really be debating and approving a plan that would acknowledge the 600,000 men and women who are unemployed in this province and adopt measures that would create the kind of environment in which jobs would flourish, the kind of Ontario where there is work for all who want to work, the kind of Ontario that has opportunities for all Ontarians in an Ontario that delivers on its promises.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Bill 2 should have passed a long time ago. This is something that we're going to move forward with that will assist some. It should have

been done a long time ago. We should have been moving on to the greater things that our seniors need.

I don't know what you're hearing at the doors, but this is what I'm hearing at the doors: It's desperation. Our seniors really want to have the assistance in their homes. They want to have their care in their homes so they can stay in their homes. They want to have assistance to get the shovelling done. They want to have assistance with mobility in order to get to the grocery store so they don't have to get caught up and moved into a home.

This is what people are really looking for. This is what our seniors are asking for. This bill needs to move forward. Push it, let's get it done, and let's move on with the real important issues where we can really start moving with our seniors.

I would suggest to this government to actually consider what our neighbouring province is doing. Quebec has a program that provides assistance to low-income seniors aged 65 and over who need to make minor adaptations to their homes or apartments in order to continue to live in their homes. This program does not limit itself to 15% of the cost but, rather, provides the full reimbursement up to a full cost of \$3,500. This is something that could work here.

If we want to put meat to this bill, this—let's get this one out of the way. Hopefully it will move, and some of our seniors will benefit from it. But it will certainly not address the needs of the seniors in Algoma-Manitowlin who have been questioning me at the door: "What is our government doing for me today to assist me so I can live in my home?"

Let's move this thing forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you to the member from Burlington for her comments. Bill 2 is, in fact, a good bill and it will help a number of seniors in the province of Ontario remain in their homes. It will help them financially. You do not have to spend \$10,000 to be eligible for the credit. You can spend a maximum of \$10,000 in every year and get 15% back on that, just to clear that up.

Speaker, part of the discussion that's taking place here today when it comes to this particular bill is framing this particular piece of legislation as if it is the only thing that our government has done for seniors since coming into government in 2003. I want to quickly, in the short time that I have, run down some of those other things that we've done since 2003: enhancements to the energy and property tax credit for seniors, providing a credit maximum of up to \$1,025 annually; personal income tax cuts—93% of payers in the province now pay less—about \$200 annual savings.

The Ontario sales tax credit: The new permanent tax credit provides an annual payment of up to \$260 for every senior in addition to the existing GST credit.

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Seniors in the north: This was worked on very hard by our Liberal northern caucus. Northern residents who pay rent or property tax for their principal residence are

eligible for an annual credit of up to \$130 if you're a single person, up to \$200 for a family.

The Ontario senior homeowners' property tax credit doubled to \$500 in 2010, announced in our 2008 budget. The government is providing about \$1 billion. We've increased access to their locked-in accounts; income splitting for seniors. Additionally, seniors: 10% off your electricity bill for the next five years. It's called the Ontario clean energy benefit, available to everybody in the entire province of Ontario.

So, far beyond just Bill 2, there's a whole long list of things that we've done for seniors in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to rise to speak about this bill. I hear the members from the NDP wanting this bill pushed through, that we've got to hurry up and get it going. But the reason it wasn't pushed through is because this government is more interested in destroying industry than creating it, and I point to the horse racing industry, where they just got rid of 30,000 jobs. They moved on that at lightning speed. I can understand why they didn't bring this bill. They would rather move in that direction.

It was pointed out by members opposite that there's a 10% credit on paying—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. Folks, I'd like to remind the official opposition that their member is standing up and trying to say something, and I've got two people who are louder than him. Maybe you want to show some respect to your fellow colleague by keeping it down a bit. And I'd ask the decibel level to go down over here. It seems to be a problem area right now.

Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker.

The government has pointed out that there's a 10% reduction in hydro rates that they got through a previous time. But their hydro rates have gone up some 40%, so it doesn't make any sense here. It hasn't had the effect that this government certainly had hoped it would make.

With their failed Green Energy Act and putting people out of work in the horse racing industry, you can understand—it's interesting why they wouldn't want to push this bill ahead a little sooner. But they're too interested in doing that. They have no job creation legislation. Industry is leaving this province in record levels.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, last warning.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm always pleased to rise and talk about any bill that's come before this House. Sometimes things take a lot longer than they should, but we have to respect the process and debate it out and have

discussions about it. We're here in this Legislature to get results for Ontarians, so I hope that bills don't drag out this long on other items that are very crucial, and seniors are a very crucial part of my community of London-Fanshawe. I know that some—and we've said this repeatedly—of our seniors in my community will benefit from this. But I think when you look at this bill, the seniors that will be able to get the full effect from this are those who have \$10,000 to spend, to get at least a \$1,500 rebate.

But seniors are also—their lifestyle encompasses, of course, money. Income is a major focus of everyone when you're surviving day to day, trying to make ends meet at home. But for seniors also, there are segments of that that we're not thinking of when we look at this bill, and that's things that keep you in your home day to day.

Sometimes seniors are older and they can't do their laundry. The laundry is very heavy, or they can't bend down to pick up their laundry; or, as my colleague from Hamilton Mountain said, shovel the snow, cut the grass. This year we've had drought and it's been extremely hot. I don't see any seniors going out to cut the grass. It's a shame this bill doesn't incorporate that part of a senior's lifestyle, to keep them in their homes. It has to be two-parts: income, in order to make sure that physically they can remain in their home, or apartment for that matter—that's been one that's kind of been of this bill—and the other part being the day-to-day, everyday life chores that seniors physically can't do, that they need help with.

So I'd like to pass this bill and move on to the next item that's crucial to other Ontarians. I certainly understand the seriousness of it, but we do need to get on with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Burlington has two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: In my earlier segment, I mentioned the cruel joke of Freedom 75. I should say that seniors, some of whom are still working, obviously, are as worried about the economy as anyone. They are worried about it for themselves and for their families, their friends, their communities, their children and their grandchildren. They're watching as their grandchildren emerge from university or college to an unemployment wasteland.

They're starting to do the math and realizing that this government has presided over an economy that has now gone well over five years with an unemployment rate above the national average. The Ontario that they grew up with has changed in some very profound and disappointing ways. They invested their lives here; they invested their love here. And this government has let them down: billion-dollar boondoggles like Omge and eHealth, cynical electioneering—these examples are too numerous to list—preaching transparency but religiously evading accountability, as it has on the cost of the power plant cancellation in Mississauga and Oakville. Again—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. I would suggest to the member from Burlington that she stick to the issue. You're drifting. Okay? We're

talking about a bill; we're not talking about those other things.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Again, if we're here talking about seniors staying at home, if we're talking about a tax credit that will make their lives easier, the government could do a lot of good by warming up to legislation like the HST rebate for home heating bill—real relief. Until we see a day like that, the Ontario PC caucus has misgivings about the government's claims that care and relief for seniors is much of a priority for them.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being past 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to recognize the members of the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors who are with us in the Speaker's gallery today, including their chair, Craig Richardson. I hope all members will take the time to, first of all, read the economic impact study that they presented today at Queen's Park for us to read as to what they do in our economy; and secondly, to attend their reception this evening in rooms 228 and 230 to learn more about this very important industry to the economy of Ontario.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would also like to recognize the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors and specifically an old sparring partner of mine, Tom Kane.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's my pleasure, in the members' east gallery, to introduce to the Legislative Assembly Maisie Robinson.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Lloyd and Mary Lou Lichti from Stratford; Rick O'Donnell; his wife, Angela Huang; his mother, Verna O'Donnell; and his aunt, Velma McKellar, all from Mitchell. Welcome.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a series of guests to introduce. They will be making their way in. It's Bill Jeffery, the national coordinator for the Center for Science in the Public Interest; Dr. Mary L'Abbé, who is the chair of the department of nutritional sciences, faculty of medicine, at the University of Toronto; Megan Ogilvie, who is from the Toronto Star, author of Menu Confidential; Dr. David Hammond from the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo; Heather Manson, the chief of health promotion, chronic disease and injury prevention at Public Health Ontario; Mrs. Patricia Hughes, executive director of the Law Commission of Ontario; Mrs. Judi Farrell, executive director of Hypertension Canada; and Dr. Doug Weir—well known to us—president of the Ontario Medical Association.

I also have Dr. Bryan Bollinger from the school of business at New York City University, and Christina Huang, who is from Santa Monica. They're all here at Queen's Park in rooms 228 and 230, talking about Writ-

ing on the Wall, for putting calorie labelling on menus. They will be making their way in, but they invite everybody to drop in at lunchtime in rooms 228 and 230.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm delighted this morning—Rocco Forgione, who is the father of my legislative assistant, Andrew, will be joining us in the Legislature today to watch the proceedings. I would like to welcome him to the Legislature.

LEGISLATIVE INTERNS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On Monday, I made a mistake. Today, I correct it.

We have with me in the Speaker's gallery today the new team of the Ontario legislative interns. Please join me in warmly welcoming Simmerpreet Anand, Connor Bays, Anthony Boland, Joshua Borden, Elizabeth Elder, Andrea Ernesaks, Gillian Hanson, Leanna Katz, Hibah Sidat and Lauren Tarasuk. Welcome to Queen's Park, and good luck.

As I did have an opportunity to meet the interns: They're hiring you; you're not hiring them, so behave yourselves. Thank you for joining us, and thank you for the help that you provide through this program to all of our members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Premier this morning. Premier, a few weeks ago when you were pretending to get tough on one sector of the public service, you put the rest on notice, or so you claimed. "We're coming," you warned, when speaking about an across-the-board public sector wage freeze. But despite your assurances, the only thing that's coming is an MPAC convention for its 1,500 or so government employees today in Toronto. You can't talk about fiscal responsibility out of one side of your mouth and at the same time allow your employees to organize a convention right smack in the middle of the Toronto International Film Festival, when hotel and convention space are at a premium.

Why, when faced with Ontario's debt and deficit, did you allow this extravagant convention to move forward? When are you finally going to put your money, so to speak, where your mouth is and actually take responsibility for the costs your government keeps incurring?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have no authority over the decisions of MPAC, which is municipally operated.

Let me say to the member opposite that I concur. I thought it was kind of a boneheaded thing to do. I don't understand it. It's not a good use of money. I'm arranging to speak to the Chair—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members on all sides, let's bring the tone down, please.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I will be speaking to the Chair. Unfortunately, we have no power of directive over them. They are controlled by the municipalities of Ontario in a structure that was set up by your government. But again, I concur with you. I thought it was inappropriate, a terrible use of money, absolutely the wrong thing to do, and I'd ask them not to do it again. I don't know how we can retrieve that sort of thing, but we find it as unacceptable as you do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Speaker, the MPAC convention is not just your average gathering of employees. I wish that it were so. This is a convention where government employees will be wine and dined, the event catered by a vendor who boasts that they've served the likes of Oprah, Elizabeth Taylor and Karl Lagerfeld. How very TIFF of you, Premier.

In addition to covering the costs of extravagant catering, taxpayers are on the hook for the better part of \$1 million so that government employees can play team-building Lego games and perhaps do a little stargazing while they're at it. MPAC people, by the way, received an 8% pay hike in contract settlements early this year.

Premier, this is not just wasteful spending; frankly, it's offensive. You've been trying to convince us that you've found religion when it comes to reckless spending, but clearly that conversion has not yet taken place. What is the explanation for this latest Liberal spending scandal?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I just remind the member opposite that MPAC is not a provincial agency; it's a municipal agency. I just remind him—let me remind him. I concur. It's an inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars. I completely concur with that. There is a 15-member board, of which there are two provincial representatives. The Chair is chosen by the municipal employees.

Let me stress: I think it's an inappropriate use of money, I concur entirely with the official opposition; I was quite astounded when I heard about it and I think it's an inappropriate use of municipal money. I concur, and I'm glad we've had an opportunity to discuss this in the context of broader restraint that we are—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm glad that the minister concurs. We have listened to your assurances, but the facts speak for themselves.

The government is not scoring any points when it comes to oversight and management. This week's frivolous MPAC convention is not the first and not the only example of government mismanagement. EHealth, the Windsor Energy Centre more recently and, much more disturbingly, Ornge are all scandals that Ontario couldn't and cannot afford. At best, these are examples of a shameful waste of taxpayer money. At worst, they endangered the health, indeed, the lives of Ontario residents.

Ontarians cannot afford any more scandals, any more frivolous government conventions and any more platitudes. When will your government finally start doing your job and commit to protecting Ontario taxpayers, rather than abusing their trust?

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have in fact laid out a plan. I'll be reporting public accounts tomorrow morning in terms of achievements to date. I concur with the opposition about this particular circumstance.

I'd also remind the opposition that the PC Party promised to put their expenses for meals, hospitality and other things all online. That was 2010, Mr. Speaker. They never have. They have not put the expenses for their leader's office. I concur on MPAC. I would simply ask you to quit hiding your meals, your hospitality, your leader's travels. I hope he's not expensing his fishing licence anymore.

But thank you for raising MPAC. I agree: absolutely inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is for the Premier. The Liberal government just doesn't get it. They can't wrap their heads around the fact that their reckless overspending has Ontario headed down a path to economic and financial ruin. The scandal and waste we've seen for nine years continues unabated. Despite 57,000 Ontarians losing their jobs last month, fat-cat bureaucrats, your bureaucrats in the Liberal government, continue to feast at the taxpayer trough. Hundreds of thousands of dollars—that's the price tag for a ritzy two-and-a-half-hour bureaucratic Lego party.

Will the Premier step aside and let the PC caucus clean up his mess and return Ontario to economic and fiscal health?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I concur. I think it's an inappropriate use of money. The board needs to deal with that. Unfortunately, the government of Ontario can't impact it. It's a municipal board; it is controlled by municipalities.

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: You know, MPAC—that's right, my colleague reminds me—Municipal Property Assessment Corp. I concur: It's a horrible use of municipal taxpayers' money.

And I would ask the member, will you ask your leader to now start posting his hidden expenses so people can see how much he's spending on meals and on travel, so we can see if he's still expensing his fishing licence or if he is still expensing his Chicken McNuggets?

I concur: The MPAC boondoggle is unacceptable to taxpayers and unacceptable to this government. Unfortunately, we don't have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to take this moment to remind the gov-

ernment side that when answering questions, it is to actually answer questions about government policy and issues. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you, Speaker, and back to the Premier: The public service is laughing at you. They're laughing in your face. You've known about this for months and you've done nothing. You continue to pass the buck.

Bureaucrats thought it was entirely responsible to rent the Toronto centre for the arts at a cost of \$200,000. Why? To play with Lego. Apparently they also felt it was reasonable to wine and dine themselves like Cleopatra herself—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I can't hear the question, opposition members.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Like moths to a flame, the Liberals' bloated and greedy government can't say no to ripping off taxpayers every chance it gets. The Premier talks tough but is clearly a pushover, a paper tiger, someone the civil service has no problem defying.

When will the Liberal government get a grip, say enough is enough and put an end to its nine years of waste, scandal and corruption?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, MPAC is a municipally run operation. There is no provincial tax money in that. They are independent of the government of Ontario.

We concur with the official opposition that this was not an appropriate use of municipal tax money. We find it unacceptable. We are continuing to reduce our deficit, to get back to balance.

I'll be reporting out public accounts tomorrow, which I believe will reflect some of the challenges that still remain for us but will also show some of the progress we have been able to achieve working together, moving this province forward together, as we eliminate the deficit and continue to make important investments in health and education, which are essential to a brighter and better economic future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Just to be clear, it's this government that appoints their cronies to run these agencies, boards and commissions.

The McGuinty Liberals have lost complete touch with reality. They feel entitled to their entitlements. Sadly, these entitlements always come at the taxpayers' expense. Some 57,000 Ontarians lost their job last month, and this McGuinty Liberal government is busy playing with Lego and dining with movie stars.

The chair of MPAC justified this shameful spending, much like Minister Matthews justifies the \$2.4 billion she poured down the drain at eHealth and Minister Bentley justifies his squandering of at least half a billion dollars on cancelled power plants.

Does the Premier acknowledge that this government's spending is out of control, and will he fire every person responsible, including the chair of MPAC, for yet another spending scandal, more scandal that has occurred—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It is important that we get back to balance. It is important to have full transparency and accountability in expenditures. I believe that this was an inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars. I don't concur with those who think this is a good use of money. If I were with AMO I would be absolutely outraged.

But I also think it's important for the opposition to start putting their expenses online. They said in 2010 they would do that as part of increased transparency and accountability. So while they get up on their hind legs and want accountability here—and they're right to want that—I think taxpayers want to know how much they are spending and what they're spending it on. I've got a whole list of very interesting things that have some historic connection to the now Leader of the Opposition, which we'll be happy to talk about more.

But yes, the MPAC decision was a bad use of municipal tax dollars—no provincial money in it. We do not have the ability to run the day-to-day operations. I've expressed my concerns to the board and will continue to do so. I hope AMO will take them to task for this most unfortunate use of public money.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. This morning the finance minister was in the papers insisting that we can expect more legislation, exactly the same kind of simplistic, unconstitutional legislation that the Premier has been warning against not so long ago. I want to know why the Premier is prepared to move ahead with a plan that he's admitted many times isn't working.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate my honourable colleague's interest in the next initiative we'd like to move ahead with, but I would encourage her to wait for the details before she attacks it. That will allow her to come to understand exactly what we want to do and how we want to do it.

But I can say at the highest level that, in keeping with the pronouncements that we made in our budget some six months ago, we think it's important to understand that we're all in this together. I speak to the broader public sector, all of us who have the privilege of working for Ontarians through the public sector, and we all have to find a way to be part of the solution. We want to do that in a way that is respectful of our collective agreements and the collective bargaining process, but we also want to be respectful of the taxpayers and their demands of us that we find a way to continue to protect health care and education as priority services.

So I encourage my honourable colleague to wait for the details. I'd be very interested in having her support, of course, as we move forward with that initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Allow me to remind the Premier: Mere weeks ago the government denounced a Conservative plan for an "unconstitutional wage scheme" that would "cost families billions." I just want to know when the Premier changed his mind.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague—and I can appreciate that she is eager; if nothing else, she is eager. I would ask her to wait for some of the details and she will see that our initiative will indeed be respectful of the collective bargaining process and also of collective agreements. So I would encourage her to wait for the details, and obviously we would appreciate her support as we move forward together on behalf of the good people of Ontario to both tackle the deficit and protect those important public services that families have to count on.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplement-ary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People want a government that focuses on their challenges. Instead, they see a Premier who's plowing ahead with a plan that he has admitted himself will not work, a plan that's causing turmoil in the classroom as we speak, a plan that will cost more in the long run to the good people of this province, a plan that his own MPPs are scrambling to distance themselves from, a plan his own cabinet is raising serious concerns about.

Is the Premier ready to stop playing politics and start focusing on a plan that will actually get real results for the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I say to my honourable colleague, I think we've got a lot of common ground when it comes to finding ways to both protect and improve the quality of our public services like health care and education, but where we part company is on the honourable leader of the third party's refusal to acknowledge that we need to do something about the deficit. We need to tackle that in a thoughtful and responsible way. As I've been saying lately, we owe our children more than just a great quality education; we owe them a strong economy that creates good jobs for them.

So, we need to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We need to protect health care and we need to protect education, but we are also called upon to introduce some measures that show some restraint. If more than half the money that we spend as a government goes into compensation, I think we understand we have to do something about compensation. In particular, we've got to freeze it for a couple of years. That's our approach, Speaker, and that's where I part company with my honourable colleague.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Unfortunately, the people of Ontario keep seeing the same pattern from this government: short-term

decisions that are more about politics than they are about people, and long-term costs that are being hidden from the public until they get stuck with a huge bill.

Does the Premier have faith in the public, or is he just concerned that if they actually knew the facts, his job would be at risk?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, we're making decisions—some of those are popular, some of those are less popular. My honourable colleague says we're playing politics. Dealing with the ONTC matter is not an easy political issue, and it's not one that's designed to make us popular. Dealing with horse racing in Ontario is not an easy political issue. The principal purpose of that is not to make us popular. Dealing with teacher pay is not an easy political issue. The purpose of that is certainly not, initially, to make us more popular.

What I'm saying to my honourable colleague is that leadership has something to do with making decisions—some of those decisions are difficult, some of them will be necessarily unpopular, but that's what leadership is fundamentally all about. So I'd invite my honourable colleague to acknowledge that at some point in time, stop finding parades in which she can jump in the front of and understand you've got to make some difficult decisions if you want to lead.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think it was the Tory bus that they jumped on recently, Speaker, never mind a parade.

Nonetheless, last month the Premier passed a very simplistic bill—a very simplistic bill—that affects our schools, but never mentioned once the Supreme Court challenge that's sure to follow. He promised peace and stability in schools but, instead, he has brought turmoil to the classroom.

Now we've seen it with cancelled power plants that cost millions. We've seen it with the mess at Ornge. Why should the people believe that this government is interested in putting people first when time and again they put themselves first and leave people paying the hefty bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, my honourable colleague believes that we should continue to subsidize ONTC at \$400 per passenger. She believes that we should continue to subsidize horse racing at a cost of \$345 million on an annual basis. She thinks that we should give teachers an increase in pay. She thinks that we should give doctors an increase in pay. She thinks that we should give everybody in the broader public sector an increase in pay.

In an ideal world, we'd be able to support all those things, but we don't live in an ideal world. We live in this one, and our world has changed somewhat dramatically. We went through a very difficult recession. We're now carrying a significant deficit. Our rate of economic growth is somewhat slow. There's an 8% unemployment rate. So we've got to make some difficult decisions. We

can't fund everything in the same way that we did in the past, so we've got to make some choices.

We're saying on behalf of Ontario families: We're going to protect your schools and we're going to protect health care. We're going to eliminate the deficit as a foundation for a stronger economy. That's what we need to do, Speaker, and that's what we will do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Unfortunately, Speaker, what the people see are choices that the Liberals make to take care of their own political interests first and foremost.

The Premier insists that his plan is working, but the people who make this province work every day are left with real serious doubts. They see turmoil in the schools. They see the highest electricity bills in the country, which they pay every month. The highest electricity bills in the country are paid by Ontarians. They see a job strategy that simply isn't working, as hundreds of thousands of Ontarians remain without a job.

When is the Premier going to stop playing the same old political games and start working on a real plan to make life better for the people who pay the bills and make Ontario work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would be delighted to see some specifics of my honourable colleague's plan to eliminate the Ontario deficit. I'd love to see some specifics, but I'm not going to hold my breath.

My honourable colleague raised the issue of turmoil in our schools. I would make to my honourable colleague the same invitation that I've extended to Ontario teachers. I know that we have entered into a rough patch when it comes to our relationship with Ontario teachers—some Ontario teachers. But I think we owe it to ourselves, as responsible adults, to keep finding a way forward, to keep working hard to re-establish a positive, constructive relationship in the way that has worked so well for kids.

I think we need to leave the students out of this. I think we need to find a way, teachers and government, to work together. We've enjoyed so much success during the past nine years on behalf of our students. Let's find a way to re-establish that relationship going forward.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, MPAC, a provincial agency answerable directly to you, is presently in the process of blowing hundreds of thousands of dollars on an extravagant Lego party. Not only are the MPAC bureaucrats gathering in Toronto during the Toronto International Film Festival—the most expensive time possible—but they're being treated to high-end catering, entertainment and luxurious accommodations. The bureaucrats at MPAC must not be paying attention. They clearly didn't get the minister's memo about the debt crisis he created in the province of Ontario.

Ontario is on the verge of financial collapse, but the McGuinty Liberals just can't stop spending. Can the

minister inform the House if he will be demanding that MPAC recoup the costs of its high-priced Lego party, or will the taxpayers foot the bill once again?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, there is no directive power for the minister or for the government. It is a municipal corporation. I concur with the official opposition: I think this is a very inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars.

We laid out a budget that, in fact, reduced expenditures. We have brought the rate of growth in expenditures lower. That party voted against every one of those initiatives. They voted against lowering expenses across a variety—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would invite the member to look at the addendum to the budget, which detailed, line by line, where those expenditures were coming out. That is an important process.

With respect to MPAC, unfortunately, this is not a government agency, as you have suggested. It is in fact controlled by municipalities. It is municipal tax dollars. I do concur that this is an inappropriate use of tax dollars, and I would invite the board and municipalities to explain to taxpayers how they will recoup that money.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, you can spin this any way you want. You can dodge and duck any way you want. But you directly appoint all members of that board. Dodge and duck and try to avoid your responsibility here, but Minister, I say to you, you haven't got a Lego to stand on.

The Liberals' long-established legacy of waste and scandal continues unabated. In 2010, the Auditor General found that MPAC had spent \$50 million over five years on goods and services, without supporting documentation. It turns out it was tailor-made golf clubs and gift cards and all kind of shenanigans. We now know they didn't bother to get a receipt: 200 grand to rent a theatre, thousands of dollars on swanky catering, travel and accommodations—no wonder they don't want a paper trail.

I ask you, Minister, will you admit that you have lost control of Ontario's finances and fire every person responsible for this gross misuse of public funds?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Finance.

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, they wanted to fire everybody at the Ministry of Health. Now they want to fire everybody at MPAC. It's just a growing air of desperation.

With respect to the Auditor General's recommendations from 2010, all of them have been acted on and implemented.

I concur—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce-Grey, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In the context of the economy today, I was as shocked and disappointed as the opposition was with what I consider to be—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —a very inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars.

I look forward to working with all members of this House as we move back to balance to make sure that things like this don't happen again. I'll be speaking with the two of 15 members of the board who are provincial appointees.

I concur completely. It was a very inappropriate use of money. It really does do harm to a good thing like Lego, which I think that member plays with a lot. I have to concur with his anger and upset at this. I think it was very inappropriate, and I thank you for giving expression to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Yesterday, the government of Quebec confirmed that it will not refurbish the aging Gentilly nuclear plant. It says that refurbishing the plant is too expensive and hinders the shift to cleaner, safer renewable power. Why is the government of Ontario blindly proceeding with plans to refurbish the similarly outdated Darlington nuclear power plant before it even knows what it will cost?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Interesting: Yesterday, the Atikokan facility in northwestern Ontario burned its last bit of coal. We're getting out of coal by the end of 2014. We're not putting it on standby like the NDP would; we're getting out of coal.

Nuclear has long been a clean fuel that happens, in the province of Ontario, to contribute to the employment of 70,000 people. The Darlington facility, which the NDP commissioned, happens to be one of the most efficient and effective nuclear facilities in the world. It makes sense to refurbish it so it can continue to contribute to our energy output—a stable, clean supply for decades to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The minister is nothing if not a great deflector. You do not know the cost of this. Quebec joins a growing list of jurisdictions around the world that are phasing out nuclear power because of growing safety concerns and rising costs: Belgium, Italy, Germany, Sweden and likely even Japan today.

Before deciding to proceed with the Darlington refurbishment, will the minister at least reveal to the people of Ontario the exact cost of this project and then allow a full consideration of cost-effective alternatives?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We'll always do what's in the best interests of the people of the province of

Ontario. Nuclear has been a strong part of our energy supply, supporting 70,000-plus people in the province of Ontario. To those 70,000 people and families, the NDP says, “No, you’re out of a job.” To the clean energy that comes from nuclear power, the NDP says, “No, we’d rather have coal on standby.”

It’s great to be against everything. They didn’t like the feed-in-tariff program. They don’t like private entrepreneurs bringing on clean, green electricity. They don’t like nuclear. They don’t like the jobs. One of these days, they’re going to tell us what they really do like.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Although I regularly ask the minister about health care issues in my western Mississauga neighbourhoods of Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville, today I’d like to ask her a question on behalf of Ontarians in the Northumberland area.

Our hospitals face many different pressures, some of which they have control over and some of which they do not. One such case of unplanned costs concerns recent outbreaks at Northumberland Hills Hospital. The hospital must deal with difficulties funding the \$100,000 associated with these outbreaks.

Minister, what can we do to make sure hospitals like Northumberland Hills are in a position to effectively respond to outbreaks, while ensuring they have the necessary funds to provide excellent patient care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member from Mississauga—Streetsville for this very important question.

I want to underline that patient safety is the number one focus in our hospitals. Providing high-quality care is their commitment to their patients. We know that if you track it, you can report it, and if you report it, you can improve it, and that’s exactly what we’re seeing when it comes to outbreaks in hospitals such as Northumberland Hills.

Northumberland Hills Hospital is a vital part of that community, and we’ve increased funding by \$12 million since 2003. This year, they’re receiving \$38.3 million. While sustaining funding for hospitals is important, we are also making the decision that we must now invest outside of those hospital walls—hold hospital budgets in line so we can invest more in community care.

We are seeing demonstrated results from this strategic decision. I’m proud to say that the CCAC in that area supports 53,000 people—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, hospitals like Northumberland Hills need to benefit from Ontario’s commitment to improved patient safety and accountability. This hospital is working with the Central East Local Health Integration Network to improve patient safety. We appreciate the efforts of all of the front-line staff who work so hard from day to day.

Patients across the province are eager to know what this means for them. Minister, what does Ontario’s com-

mitment to patient safety mean for patients, hospitals and health care workers across the province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our commitment to patient safety means better patient care; it’s as simple as that. We know, as I’ve said, if we track it, if we measure it, we can improve it.

Let’s talk about wait times in the Central East LHIN. I’m very happy to say that 100% of cataract surgeries are now being performed within the target; 100% of hip replacements are being performed within the target; 99% of knee replacements are being performed within the target; and 96% of CT scans, 91% of pediatric surgeries and 99% of general surgeries.

Speaker, our decision many years ago to begin to measure and publicly report wait times has made a profound difference. It allows us to invest strategically where we’re not meeting wait times so that the people of the province, no matter where they live, get access to care in a timely way.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Minister of Finance. The minister simply won’t come to terms with his addiction to wasteful spending, and the people of Ontario are fed up. Minister, how can you justify to those 600,000 men and women who are out of work in this province the fact that you condone the Municipal Property Assessment Corp.—that you appoint, sir—the fact that they’ve flown in 2,000 bureaucrats to the extravagant performing arts centre at the peak of TIFF for a two-and-a-half-hour Lego party?

Minister, I want to quote MPAC’s website: “MPAC is governed by a 15-member board of directors. Eight members of the board are municipal representatives; five members represent property taxpayers; and two members represent provincial interests. All members of the board are appointed by the Ontario Minister of Finance.”

Minister, you appoint the board. Stand in your place and tell us what you’re going to do about this.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I’d remind the member that, yes, we do appoint the municipal representatives based on the recommendations of AMO and the municipalities.

Interjection: He knows that.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: He knows that because it was in fact the Conservative government that set this very unwieldy creature up.

In my view, I don’t condone this expenditure. I think it’s a completely inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars. If I had the directive power to undo it, I would have undone it when I first heard about this about 24 hours ago. Unfortunately, I don’t have that. But what I can say is that we will continue to pursue a balanced budget in those areas that we control.

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My hope is that AMO and our municipal partners will look at this carefully to decide how to handle it. I would invite the member to speak to his local mayors and

others. I concur: I don't think this is an appropriate use of taxpayers' money. It does not make sense. I don't think there's any benefit to municipal taxpayers from this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Again to the minister: I can't believe what I'm hearing. After nine years of scandal and waste that have led to record debt and deficits, I think we all have to acknowledge the elephant in the room. Minister, you have a serious addiction on wasted spending. I can't understand why you condone what's happening with MPAC, the fact that you bring them into town for a two-and-a-half-hour Lego party.

Minister, they are your boards. You appoint them. Do the honourable thing: Rein in their spending or resign.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Speaker, I don't condone this. If I had the legal authority to do what the member asks, I would likely exercise that authority. Regrettably, I don't. Let me say again that I do not condone this. I hope our municipal partners will take this issue very seriously. I do not think it's an appropriate use of taxpayers' money.

I do appoint members based on the recommendation of our municipal partners. We do have two of 15 members on the board who are provincial appointees. This whole situation makes me wonder if we do have to look at the construct of this. It was badly set up initially by the previous government. I think we need to look at MPAC, its future, how it should be governed, who should own it and what's appropriate. Unfortunately, the structure that was set up by the previous government has left us with no ability to influence this. But I do concur with the opposition: This is an inappropriate use of municipal tax dollars.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Speaker, in an August 22 meeting, the Ministry of Labour and the NHL in Toronto, the NHL Players' Association, asked the province to set up a conciliation board to help solve the dispute. But for no apparent reason, the ministry refused the association's request. Speaker, why is this government refusing to do whatever it can do to save the hockey season and the many, many economic benefits that flow from the game?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Speaker, I know—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm asking for order on all sides, please.

Minister.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Thank you, Speaker. I know many people across this province are looking forward to the start of the NHL season, but I would like to bring some clarity to what my ministry's involvement is in the NHL labour negotiations, as I believe there are a few additional process details that would help Ontarians, and

indeed fans, across the floor and across Canada better understand about the hockey negotiations.

In August, on the 22nd, a Ministry of Labour conciliator met with both the NHL and the players' association. During that meeting, the NHL asked the Ministry of Labour to issue a no-board report. The no-board report places both the players' association and the NHL in a lockout position 17 days after it's issued. I want to point out that it only applies to teams in Ontario, the ones that reside in Ontario—the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Ottawa Senators—and that's part of the larger process.

We obviously want to provide details to both sides, and we're bargaining with respect to the teams. Across the US and Canada, these negotiations are going on. They're governed by the respective principle—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Hockey isn't just another game for Ontarians. You spend your childhood being raised with the game. You devote long hours to playing it, watching it and talking about it. For millions of Ontarians, being a real Leaf—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm asking that the government side tone it down, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not while I'm standing either.

Question.

Mr. Paul Miller: For millions of Ontarians, being a real Leafs fan or a real Sens fan is something you live, breathe and talk about every day, especially during hockey season.

Speaker, why does this government refuse the players' association request for conciliation, which could have maybe helped save the upcoming season? Why don't you stand behind the people of Ontario who want hockey?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Speaker, the process that the NHL and the players' association went through happens without political interference, and it is no different than any other labour negotiations that take place across this province.

With respect to the players in Ontario, my ministry has offered mediation assistance, but so far that offer has not been accepted. I understand that the parties are now using the assistance of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service based in Washington, DC.

I know that many people across the province are interested in these negotiations, as am I, but certainly political interference is not what we do. We've got shared responsibility. We want to work with both sides and provide that neutral advice going forward, because we care about hockey too, on this side of the floor.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is also for the Minister of Labour, but I'm afraid this is a little bit more

directly under her control than perhaps hockey in North America.

Minister, this week I've been listening to the official opposition ask question after question about their white paper on health care. I understand this is actually the third paper that has been released and that the official opposition has previously released a white paper on labour. It's actually that release that my constituents have been raising concerns about.

When they hear phrases like "right to work," they're very concerned that far-right-wing policies from the United States are making their way to Canada. My constituents tell me that they are afraid that these schemes will lower their wages and have an adverse effect on the economy. Yesterday, during the debate, I heard some comments about right to work from the official opposition.

I wonder, Minister, if you could reassure my constituents in Guelph that these tactics are not gaining ground in—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Stop the clock for a second. First of all, I am standing, and you used your time. Second of all, when the preamble takes place—for all members—I would wish that you would make it clear so that I can make a decision on whether or not it is policy. I know that the question was probably going to wrap that up, but if you do not put your question that way, I may have to bring you back to the policy question.

Now it's time for the Minister of Labour to answer that question.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member for a very important question. Over the last eight years, we worked really hard to create a fair and balanced environment for labour negotiations in Ontario. To do that, we've rebuilt relationships that were damaged by the governments that preceded us. This fair and balanced approach to labour relations presents a fairly stark contrast to the divide-and-conquer approach of the official opposition.

In their white paper, they make a lot of unsubstantiated claims about how right-to-work legislation will help Ontario compete with the US market. Leaders across Canada have continuously rejected these claims, including Ralph Klein's Conservative government in Alberta, which determined that right-to-work legislation was unnecessary in helping that province compete with the US.

They based their decision on a 1995 KPMG report which actually indicated that it costs less to do business in Canada. Today that's still the case. Canada ranks third in business costs and the US sixth.

Ontarians are not willing to compromise on their salaries, their quality of life and a fair and balanced environment for employers and employees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Minister, for helping to clarify how our policy differs from the official opposition's and how governments of all stripes have been rejecting that right-to-work policy across Canada.

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Based on what you've said, we seem to be in a good position here in Ontario. Our economy has recovered more than 100% of the jobs lost in the last recession; our minimum wage has increased by 50% since 2003, after nine years of no increases; and our government has built up and maintained a high standard of living for Ontarians.

The official opposition seem convinced that bringing in a right-to-work scheme will increase wages, improve the economy and bring jobs to the province. What has been the actual experience of US states with right-to-work legislation, and how does Ontario compare?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Again, thanks for the question. The opposition would have us believe that this scheme would lead Ontario to higher wages, but the reality is that Ontario already has a higher median household income than every right-to-work state in the US. Furthermore, the median household income of right-to-work states is actually decreasing. Since 2008, over 70% of US right-to-work states have seen a decline in their take-home pay. In Ontario, during the same time period, we saw our household incomes increase, and under the leadership of Ontario's economy, we've recovered all those jobs that we lost in the recession by moving forward together. The opposition claim that their scheme will raise hourly wages. The reality is, our hourly wage manufacturing rate is higher than 87% of right-to-work states and 78% of non-right-to-work states.

Our government is proud of fair wages for Ontario families. I want the member to know that she can tell her constituents that the opposition's white paper is on a labour path to lower wages, a path to a smaller economy and a path that races to the bottom.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the House and to the public that the government is intentionally obstructing the work of the committee investigating the Ornge scandal. The Premier has now refused on two occasions to testify before the committee. Sophia Ikura, the Premier's senior adviser on health policy, also refused to appear. The government House leader refused to appear to testify before the committee. Now that same government House leader is delaying the reconstitution of the public accounts committee so that it can carry on its important work. I would like to know from the Premier: How can he justify causing this obstruction to the important work of this Legislature? Will he direct his government House leader to agree to reconstitute the committee to investigate the Ornge scandal?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm having trouble knowing where to start.

First of all, I never refused to appear in front of the public accounts committee. The fact of the matter is, the public accounts committee clerk sent me an email around 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon asking if I would appear the next day, and I said that my schedule would not allow it. I think members of this Legislature appreciate that on short notice, it's hard to move forward.

Second of all, it was the opposition party that insisted, when we constituted committees earlier this year, that that motion expire—it would have expired last Sunday, the last day before the sitting began—in an effort for House leaders to review the committee situation and engage in the types—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. That's enough.

Answer.

Hon. John Milloy: As I say, with the opposition's urging, the motion that set up committees expired—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —on Sunday. We are now in the process of talking to House leaders to find out how we can move forward. So, as I say, the honourable member should get his facts straight before he stands up and asks such a ridiculous question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The government House leader can start now by agreeing to appear before the committee. Then the government House leader can agree to sit down with the House leaders and immediately reconstitute the public accounts committee, and then the government House leader can admit to this House that it was he who refused to call Bill 50 before the House for debate, and that's why it still has not been passed.

Let's ask the government House leader to get his facts straight, and let's have the government House leader stand up now and say that committee will be reconstituted today, so it can get on with its work and that he'll be the first witness to appear.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again Mr. Speaker, it is the opposition parties that wanted the motion establishing the committees to expire, and we are now working with House leaders on how to move forward.

We are talking about the composition of committees, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about the work that the committees are seized with, and the public accounts committee will still be seized with the Ornge issue. We look forward to—after I believe, what is it now, 57 witnesses, 84 hours of committee hearings, 800 pages of Hansard—the work of that committee in making the types of recommendations which will allow us to address

the oversight of organizations like Ornge so that the situation there never occurs again.

We also look forward to the opposition parties to allow Bill 50 to move through this Legislature—an important bill, which is the final piece of the puzzle in addressing some of the problems that were associated with that organization.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you'll know that on the James Bay coast there has been an epidemic of attempted suicide by youth on the coast for some time. You will also know that, as a result of work that the communities did from Moose Factory to Peawanuck along with Payukotayno, which is a child and youth service, and help from the Toronto Star, I must add, and the New Democrats, your government gave Payukotayno \$2 million to be able to do some work so they can be proactive in order to try to prevent those attempted suicides from happening.

We now learned this summer that you removed that \$2 million—Payukotayno has lost \$1.7 million out of their budget—which means to say there's no longer an ability to do proactive work. They're going to have to go back to reactive.

Why have you turned your back on the youth of the James Bay?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank the member opposite for the question. I want to start by saying that our government is committed to ensuring that children and youth who are being provided with support and protection from our children's aid societies, including Payukotayno in the north, have every opportunity to reach their full potential. I want to say that since 2003, in fact, the funding by this government to Payukotayno—the children's aid society that the member opposite is referencing—has increased by more than \$6 million. It's a 98.7% increase since 2003—pretty well a double in the funding that we've provided. In fact, this year we've identified more than \$12 million in planning allocations for the agency for child welfare services.

So I understand the concern of the member opposite. It's a concern that I of course share with him in terms of making sure that we provide the support and protection that these children and families deserve. We are doing just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, it doesn't cut it with the youth. The youth are going to be gathering in Cochrane at the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council meeting this Thursday, and they're going to talk about what they see with their family and friends, who are still unfortunately in a position where far too much attempted suicide is still the norm. We've been able to make some headway because of those monies that were given.

I say to you again: It's one thing to say that you're trying to do the right thing and using all the right words, but if Payukotayno doesn't have the funding, that means they don't have the resources to deal with the proactive work that they've got to do in order to make a dent when it comes to this particular issue.

I urge you, Minister, to reverse your decision. Will you announce in the House today so the youth who are attending Mushkegowuk Tribal Council tomorrow will in fact know that this government is determined to keep that money in place?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, Mr. Speaker, we have doubled the funding to Payukotayno in the last nine years, not including this additional \$12 million that I just referenced. I want to actually specifically and directly thank the staff at Payukotayno for their remarkable contribution to children, their families and to the communities.

With reference to what you're concerned about, youth suicide in the north, just several weeks ago I had a day-long consultation—I participated in the full consultation with experts across the province on preventing youth suicide, and there was a significant presence from the north, including from our First Nations and aboriginal communities. It's a situation and an issue that I take very seriously and this government is working hard on.

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PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Colle: My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. For 20 years, the people who live and work in the Eglinton corridor from Scarborough to Etobicoke have been waiting for the new Eglinton Crosstown to be built. They are suffering with pollution, unstoppable gridlock and delays. Ever since the Mike Harris government cancelled the Eglinton subway, they've been waiting for this subway to be built.

I want to ask the Minister of Transportation, when will the people who live and work along Eglinton finally see the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown start once again? When will it start, Minister?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for Eglinton—Lawrence for the question, and I'm happy to speak on this particular landmark project.

Yesterday Metrolinx awarded the first of two contracts to tunnel the underground portion of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. Work will begin this year and will create over 3,000 jobs. This is an important step in the largest light-rail-transit expansion in Toronto's history, and we're proud of the progress that we are making. Compare our record to the PCs', who actually stopped funding public transit and filled in the Eglinton West subway line with dirt while it was under construction.

We are proud to be the only government in the past 20 years to actually build any transit in the city of Toronto. Our government is delivering real results for Torontonians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you, Minister. I know that the people who live at Eglinton and Dufferin every day are choking on diesel fumes. In fact, people's carbon monoxide detectors go off when they open their windows on Eglinton and Dufferin. That's how bad the pollution is.

So the people want to know, when will the tunnel-boring machines go in? When will we see clean transit on Eglinton, on Dufferin? When will we see the new transit subway go up to York University, up to Vaughan? When are we going to reverse the incredible benign neglect of the NDP and the horrendous decisions of the Tories? When are we going to get to work—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We know that transit is a priority in the GTA. In addition to the Eglinton Crosstown project, our plan also includes the Finch West LRT, Scarborough rapid transit conversion to LRT, and the Sheppard East LRT. That's \$8.4 billion—transit dollars—delivered by our Toronto caucus.

Work is under way on the air-rail link between Union Station and Pearson airport, Canada's two busiest transit hubs. The revitalization of Union Station will meet the needs of an expected doubling of GO Transit passengers by 2030. We also invested more than \$6 billion in modernizing the GO Transit network and expanded service to places like Kitchener, Guelph, Barrie and Lincolnville. Mr. Speaker, the sanctimonious NDP voted against funding for every single one of those projects.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I'm sure you understand that sound decision-making requires a proper assessment of the financial costs for every project before moving ahead. In fact, Ontarians analyze the costs and benefits of each important decision they make, whether they're buying a new home or starting a business. Somehow your government fails to take even these basic steps before tabling bills that will, and have, cost the province billions of dollars.

But don't take my word for it. Here's what the Auditor General had to say about your Green Energy Act: "...billions of dollars were committed to renewable energy without fully evaluating the impact, the trade-offs and the alternatives through a comprehensive business case analysis."

I'll give you an opportunity to correct these problems, starting tomorrow, by voting in favour of my bill, the transparency in government bills act. Premier, will you commit to making government decision-making more transparent, or will you continue to keep Ontarians in the dark?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Private members' bills—individual members will vote as they see fit with respect to that.

But we do welcome initiatives that increase accountability and transparency.

For instance, that member's party kept the hydro agency's expenses hidden. They promised in 2010 to put their leader's expenses online. They haven't done it. It's still hidden from public scrutiny. I would invite the member to maybe bring forward a bill that would require his leader to put his expenses online the way ministers of the crown and others do.

We welcome transparency and accountability. We've done a lot to undo the secret expenditures of the previous government. I hope their leader will listen to his member and start providing his expenditures online so taxpayers can properly scrutinize them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier: Premier, you're like someone who buys a home without doing an inspection. You've got the keys, the mover is in the driveway, but you don't know what you're walking into.

It's kind of like the Liberal government's stance on the cap-and-trade plan. You've already passed legislation and enhanced regulations to implement a job-killing cap-and-trade scheme which the environment minister in fact confirmed the Liberal government is forging ahead with. Yet in July, the finance minister said that he's never evaluated the financial costs of this plan to siphon billions of dollars from Ontario businesses. This is exactly why Bill 109 is needed. We know full well that if there's no requirement to assess how new laws will affect Ontarians, the Liberal government won't do it.

Premier, I have to ask: How do you have the audacity to table legislation in this House that will cost Ontario businesses billions of dollars without conducting a proper cost-benefit assessment?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, let's just take a look at the record. We broadened the scope of freedom-of-information legislation. The Auditor General must approve our financial books before an election so that we can't hide a deficit the way that party did. We extended freedom of information to the hydro agencies, and what did we find when we put the expenditures out? They owned a box at Maple Leaf Gardens, where they hosted Tory cabinet ministers.

We have provided for that accountability. In 2009, the Premier directed all government agencies, boards and commissions to strictly adhere to the rules of our public travel, meal and hospitality expenses. The only person not complying is the Leader of the Opposition. Post your expenses. Live up to your word. Quit hiding it. Mr. Speaker, let taxpayers see if he's still expensing his fishing licence. Let taxpayers see how much he's spending on alcohol. Let taxpayers understand what transparent—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's hear your point of order.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to wish Rocco from legislative broadcast, who just left, a very happy birthday today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member for Algoma-Manitoulin for introduction of guests.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Absolutely. Unfortunately, she's not able to be here with us; she's a patient over at Sick Kids right now. Her name is Haley Janes. She's from Elliot Lake, and I just wanted to send her my greetings. I hope you get well quite soon.

I spent a wonderful half-hour putting a little bit of a smile on her face last night while she was there at the hospital. Please say hi to her.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We all do. Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ST MARYS CEMENT

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: In 1912, John Lind and Alfred Rogers founded a small business in the town of St. Marys. With help from investors, they built a two-kiln, 180-ton-per-day cement plant. In the riverbeds and riverbanks of St. Marys, limestone could be quarried for building materials. Lind and Rogers capitalized on the area's natural raw material.

Their small business became a much larger business, making St Marys Cement one of Ontario's major producers of cement and a major success story for our area. In fact, it helped define it, attracting people and businesses to St. Marys that benefit the community and the entire region.

St Marys today operates two cement plants in Ontario, along with over 40 ready-mix concrete plants and 12 aggregate pits and quarries. They employ more than 1,700 people across the province. Their materials are found in schools, hospitals, highways, public transit, sewers, treatment plants and power plants.

The company has worked hard to be good environmental stewards and supports numerous community causes. On this Saturday, September 15, the company is holding an open house to celebrate its 100th anniversary. I look forward to joining them.

I want to congratulate this extraordinary company and all their dedicated employees on this important milestone. St. Marys, after all, is called Stonetown, and for good reasons.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I rise with a heavy heart and serious concerns for some of the residents of my riding. Hamilton city council has once again been

forced to pick up the pieces that have been downloaded by this Liberal government. Due to government cutbacks to the social supports program, the city of Hamilton has been left with a \$7-million hole in next year's budget for programs that deal with tackling homelessness.

Thank goodness for Hamilton, there's a council who will just not close their eyes to the residents who need the extra assistance, but even with that goodwill, Hamilton councillors will only be able to cover half of the \$7-million shortfall. This is going to leave families falling farther behind and add to the high taxes that Hamiltonians are already facing.

The community start-up and maintenance benefit is a program that provides extra funds for Ontario Works and ODSP recipients. These extra funds help recipients when they have to move or they're in need of last month's rent. These funds have also been used when families are struggling with bedbugs and have found themselves without beds and furniture. By no means are these luxuries; they're essentials.

In May of this year, the city of Hamilton had already put \$1.8 million into the discretionary benefit for Ontario Works recipients when the province decided to put a cap on the cities for the funds that they need for things such as funerals, eyeglasses and dental care.

I urge the Minister of Community and Social Services to reconsider these cuts, as they not only affect our most marginalized residents but also impact significantly on the residential tax base.

ROBBI WELDON

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thunder Bay is home to a remarkable number of incredible athletes—professional, amateur and recreational. Robbi Weldon has definitely earned her place as one of our city's most extraordinary athletes. She recently returned to Thunder Bay from the Paralympic Games in London with a gold medal in road cycling. Robbi Weldon is legally blind, and with her pilot, Lyne Bessette, won the women's 80-kilometre individual B road race at the Paralympic Games in London, England.

This is only part of Robbi's incredible story. Robbi can also lay claim to being Canada's top Para-Nordic skier. Her success includes two Canadian championships, and she was ranked third internationally in overall World Cup points. Robbi was Canada's top placing female Nordic skier at the 2010 Vancouver Paralympic Games, finishing fourth in the cross-country competition and sixth in the biathlon. It was only then that she shifted her focus to competitive cycling.

But, Speaker, there's more. In college, Robbi Weldon began participating in powerlifting, concentrating on the squat, bench press and dead lift. At the 1996 World Championships in Colorado Springs, Robbi Weldon of Thunder Bay set world records in not one, not two but all three disciplines.

Robbi Weldon is an extraordinary athlete by any measurement. She has achieved incredible accomplish-

ments in so many fields of athletic endeavour. On behalf of the citizens of Thunder Bay, I want to thank Robbi and congratulate her on her remarkable achievements. I wish her continued success in her future endeavours.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Lakeridge Health is one of the largest community hospital corporations in Ontario, and their Whitby campus is a true leader in health care. A specialty hospital focusing on complex continuing care and rehabilitation, the hard-working staff know all too well about the impact of an aging population on our health care resources.

The team at Lakeridge Health Whitby has risen to the challenge. They are the first hospital in the province to fully embrace a nurse practitioner-led model of care where nurse practitioners can admit, diagnose, treat and discharge patients. This is not only great news for families and seniors in my community, but it's also a big step toward developing a sustainable, affordable world-class health care system.

This change means that nurses will be able to look after patients from the beginning of their treatment to their discharge, which improves the quality of health care they receive. That's good for patients, nurses and Ontario's health care system.

On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I'd like to recognize the phenomenal achievement of Lakeridge Health for leading innovation in our health care system. Congratulations to Lakeridge.

NUTRITION LABELLING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today, a very important symposium took place at Queen's Park. It is called Writing on the Wall. It's a five-city symposium series about putting nutrition information on restaurant menus. Toronto is the third stop after Vancouver and Winnipeg, and they will be holding similar conferences in Ottawa and Halifax.

The Toronto symposium was co-sponsored by the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, a not-for-profit publisher of Nutrition Action Healthletter, and the Ontario Medical Association. Their president, Dr. Doug Weir, gave very sobering closing remarks on the health effects of poor nutrition. He also continues to be a champion of menu labelling.

This brings me to my private member's bill, Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating. This bill is quite simple. It mandates big chain restaurants to put calories on foods they offer on their menu board. That in itself won't fix the obesity epidemic, but it will empower the people of Ontario to make healthy choices for themselves and their families.

Today at 11:30, McDonald's restaurants president Jan Fields announced that starting next week, menu boards in the chain's restaurants and drive-throughs will contain calorie counts for all menu items. If McDonald's can do

this in one week for the 25 million people they serve every day, I think it is high time that Ontario put nutritional information on restaurant menus. The time has come, Mr. Speaker.

MAYFAIR THEATRE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: This is a great opportunity to talk about an iconic institution in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Mayfair Theatre is one of Ottawa's last two neighbourhood cinemas, one of the oldest surviving independent movie houses in all of Canada and the oldest movie theatre in Ottawa.

Built in 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, the Mayfair is currently in its 80th uninterrupted season. Fred Robertson, a retailer from Almonte, was the Mayfair's original owner, and the theatre remained under Robertson family ownership for half a century.

The theatre has the distinction of never having been owned by or affiliated with any of the major cinema chains and is proud of its independent roots and its role as a centrepiece of the Old Ottawa South community in my riding of Ottawa Centre.

1510

In 2008, the Mayfair was declared an official heritage building by the city of Ottawa for its unique architectural and cultural value to the nation's capital. The Mayfair Theatre is an atmospheric theatre designed in the Spanish Revival style. Designer René de Vos created the atmosphere of a Mediterranean plaza that features an ornate painted ceiling, false stone facades and balconies, wrought iron work and ornamental glass windows.

The Mayfair opened on December 5, 1932, with *The Blue Danube*. Adult admission prices were 15 cents for matinees and 25 cents for evening performances. In the 1980s, the Mayfair moved to a repertory format, and on Sundays and Mondays, Chinese-language films were played. Now the Mayfair's programming includes cult films, family matinees, late-night presentations and, of course, *Speaker*, the annual Rocky Horror Picture Show every Halloween.

Congratulations to the co-owners: Lee Demarbre, Ian Driscoll, Josh Stafford and Petr Maur.

TERRY FOX RUN

Mr. Rob Leone: I rise today to speak of a cause near and dear to all Canadians. Terry Fox remains one of our most beloved Canadian figures in this country's great history. While battling cancer, he was fearless as he embarked on an 8,000-kilometre Marathon of Hope to raise money and awareness for the devastating disease that touches so many Canadian families.

We all know that Terry's brave voyage was tragically cut short, just like the lives of far too many Canadians who took up their own fight. With all the documentaries about Terry, the 14 schools named after him, the 15 roads, monuments, postage stamps and an Athlete of the Decade Award, Terry only wanted one thing. "Even if I

don't finish," said Fox during his run, "we need others to continue. It's got to keep going without me."

Since his death in 1981, adults and children alike have taken to streets, parks and schools every September to finish what Fox started. He would be proud: his passion echoed, his accomplishments influential, his legacy cherished.

Both Cambridge and Ayr will host their own Terry Fox Runs this Sunday, September 16. Since 1982, the Cambridge total has raised over half a million dollars. This year, one of my constituents, Cowen Charrette, only four years old, has already raised \$300 for his first run. I encourage all Cambridge and Ayr residents to register, to run or to support the numerous participants eager to effect change and bring an end to this horrible disease. Please visit www.terryfox.org to learn more.

CARNET DE LA FRANCOPHONIE DES AMÉRIQUES

M. Phil McNeely: Le Centre de la francophonie des Amériques est un organisme qui a pour mission de contribuer à la promotion et à la mise en valeur d'une francophonie dans le contexte de la diversité culturelle. Il mise sur le renforcement et l'enrichissement des relations entre les communautés francophones et aussi sur l'apport des nombreux francophiles.

Leur vision d'une francophonie en mouvement, solidaire et inclusive regroupant les Amériques les a amené à mettre sur place un nouvel outil : le Carnet de la francophonie des Amériques. Ce carnet se veut un répertoire des organismes francophones reconnus offrant des services en français. On y retrouvera, entre autres, les établissements institutionnels, scolaires et communautaires ainsi que les associations et entreprises à but lucratif. Une application mobile est aussi prévue pour les utilisateurs possédant un téléphone intelligent.

Le répertoire sera disponible gratuitement à l'automne 2012 pour toute la communauté francophone. J'aimerais donc inviter tous mes collègues à me joindre et à s'inscrire au Carnet des Amériques au www.francophoniedesameriques.com.

FOOD PROCESSORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: This morning, the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors released a study showing the economic impact of their industry. It found that the total direct and indirect output generated by the food and beverage manufacturers in Ontario's economy is about \$67 billion. It generates over 360,000 jobs and close to \$5 billion in tax revenue.

The report illustrates how vital this sector is to the success of our agriculture industry and our economy. It demonstrates that the government should be looking at how we can help them grow and ensure that the government isn't blocking their success. As executive director Steve Peters said this morning, "If managed and supported properly, there are tremendous opportunities."

But this government has a poor track record. They have dramatically increased the cost of hydro and burdened these businesses with excessive red tape, permits and paperwork. The Liberals promised they would create a one-window access to government, as the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors recommended several years ago, but they are breaking that promise. A year after the Liberals copied our commitment to create one window, they have not actually taken any action to implement the promise.

We understand that food manufacturers are the number two industry in Ontario and the number one purchaser of agriculture products. On behalf of Tim Hudak and the PC caucus, I was pleased to meet with the representatives of the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors today to hear about the challenges they are facing. We look forward to continuing to work with the food processors to help strengthen the industry and, through that, the Ontario economy. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FIRST RESPONDERS DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR DES PREMIERS INTERVENANTS

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 119, An Act to proclaim First Responders Day /
Projet de loi 119, Loi proclamant le Jour des premiers intervenants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Frank Klees: If passed, this bill will designate May 1 in each year as First Responders Day in Ontario. First responders are those men and women who, in the early stages of an emergency, are responsible for the protection of life, property, evidence and the environment.

I want to thank my constituent Vali Stone for the inspiration behind this bill. Her book entitled 911: True Tales of Courage and Compassion contains the first-hand accounts of 34 first responders who have courageously shared some of their most memorable experiences in the course of carrying out their duties. These accounts and my first-hand experiences with first responders over the past number of months, the paramedics and pilots of our air ambulance service, confirmed for me that the heroes among us—the police officers, firefighters, paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, doctors, nurses and those serving in our military, including the many volunteers who dedicate countless hours to emergency response—deserve to be recognized for their selfless service to our communities in our province.

I would ask all members to support this bill at second reading, scheduled for September 27.

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

Mr. Leal moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 120, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings / Projet de loi 120, Loi visant à protéger les régimes enregistrés d'épargne en vue de la retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jeff Leal: This is a bill that I introduced previously to this Legislature. Previously it did get third reading, but not royal assent.

This would allow Ontario to join the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Saskatchewan to provide bankruptcy protection for people who have RSPs and RIFs in the province of Ontario. I would encourage all members to support this bill at second reading when it's debated on Thursday, September 27.

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ABILITY TO PAY ACT, 2012 LOI DE 2012 SUR LA CAPACITÉ DE PAYER

Mr. Wilson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 121, An Act to deal with arbitration in the public sector / Projet de loi 121, Loi traitant de l'arbitrage dans le secteur public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Jim Wilson: This bill enacts the Ability to Pay Act, 2012. The legislation is designed to address arbitrator decisions in recent years where public sector unions receive settlements far in excess of the growth in the economy. The result was to place a heavy burden on taxpayers at the Ontario and local levels as governments struggled with record deficits and a lagging economy. These decisions were allowed to happen because the interest arbitration system in Ontario is broken. It's broken because public sector unions, unlike their private sector counterparts, do not have to moderate demands to prevent putting their companies out of business. Public sector unions simply don't face these pressures because they assume governments will just raise taxes or run

deficits on the backs of future generations. Our legislation seeks to correct this inequity and requires that consideration be given to local, economic and sectorial related costs vis-à-vis a public employer's ability to pay.

The Progressive Conservative Ability to Pay Act will, if passed, achieve three main things:

- establish a permanent panel of independent arbitrators chosen by the minister;

- list specific criteria arbitrators must use when rendering decisions and explain in writing how and why decisions were made; and

- create an independent wage board within the Ministry of Finance called the Ability to Pay division to assess and monitor decisions made by arbitrators.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of bills?

I will take this moment to make an observation because I'm not interfering with anyone's time. That is, as I've indicated once before, we would wish that you read from the explanatory notes in introducing a bill and not make a statement or a speech that you would be making when the bill is introduced for second reading.

I am aware that one of these bills had a larger explanatory note, and I appreciate the efforts of the member for condensing that. That's exactly what I would recommend. But going off-script and starting to give a speech is what I'm trying to get at. So I would remind everybody to use the explanatory notes or condense your comments as a brief explanation of what the bill is. Thank you very much.

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to perform my regular function here with some accuracy.

From my riding of Durham, I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. (Hydro One) is proposing construction of a new transformer station on a 100-acre site in Clarington, near the Oshawa-Clarington boundary;

"Whereas the site is on the Oak Ridges moraine/greenbelt;

"Whereas concerns have been raised about the environmental impacts of this development, including harm to wildlife as well as contamination of ponds, streams and the underground water supply;

"Whereas sites zoned for industrial and/or commercial use are the best locations for large electricity transformer stations;

"Whereas most, if not all, residents do not agree this project is needed and that, if proven to be necessary, it could be best accommodated at" an alternative site "such as Cherrywood or Wesleyville;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Ontario Legislature support the preservation of the Oak Ridges moraine, the greenbelt and the natural environment at this site. We also ask that the Ontario Legislature require the Clarington transformer station to be built at an alternative location zoned for an industrial facility and selected in accordance with the best planning principles" and a full environmental assessment.

I'm pleased to sign this, support it and give it to Roberto, one of the pages here.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to give it to Simran. I'm going to sign it, and she will deliver it to the table.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on the prevention of electoral fraud in Ontario.

"Whereas it is the right of every Canadian to vote once in each election for the candidate of his or her choice and have their vote fairly counted and not offset by faulty voter registration or any sort of illegal practices; and

"Whereas credible allegations of voting irregularities exist for the most recent election, including non-citizens voting, persons voting multiple times at various voting stations and errors on the permanent register of electors list; and

"Whereas the practice of 'vouching' has been practised in polling stations where it is not permitted, such as non-rural polling stations, and does not require verified proof of a person's age, citizenship and residence in a riding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support Bill 106, Prevention of Electoral Fraud Act, 2012, by Bas Balkissoon, the member for Scar-

borough—Rouge River, that would require that voters present proof of Canadian citizenship; require the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario to appoint an independent party to conduct a review of the permanent register of electors within six months after the bill passes and subsequently every five years; allow scrutineers to monitor the process by which voters add their names to the voters list on election day; and forbid vouching, which currently excludes the requirement for legitimate identification.”

I support this petition, and I will have page Sashin bring it to the Clerk.

BREAST CANCER

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Sorry. The member from Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. You're right on the ball today.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, with one in eight women expected to develop it during their lifetime, as well as 1% of breast cancer cases being found in men;

“Whereas it is estimated that 62 Canadian women are diagnosed with breast cancer and 14 Canadian women die from breast cancer every day;

“Whereas early detection of breast cancer increases chances of survival but being able to identify risk factors before breast cancer develops and take preventative measures to avoid cancer is even more effective;

“Whereas breast thermography is one of the best early detection systems that uses infrared imaging of the breast tissue to identify whether a woman has the early stages of a cancerous tumour or is at a high risk of developing breast cancer;

“Whereas used in conjunction with regular mammograms and ultrasounds as part of a woman's regular breast health checkup, survival rates increase by 61%;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care consider including breast thermography examination as part of the benefit package included in a regular breast health checkup.”

I agree with the petition and affix my signature to it.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Miss Monique Taylor: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the legislative cuts to the funding for ophthalmology diagnostic tests are up to 80%; and

“Whereas these cuts were implemented without consulting physicians about the impact such cuts will have on the health care of patients;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect ophthalmology

services and consult with the physicians before making cuts to our health care system.”

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name to it and give it to page Andrew to bring to the Clerk.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas it is the right of every Canadian to vote once in each election for the candidate of his or her choice and have their vote fairly counted and not offset by faulty voter registration or any sort of illegal practices; and

“Whereas credible allegations of voting irregularities exist for the most recent election, including non-citizens voting, persons voting multiple times at various voting stations and errors on the permanent register of electors list; and

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“Whereas the practice of ‘vouching’ has been practised in polling stations where it is not permitted, such as non-rural polling stations, and does not require verified proof of a person's age, citizenship and residence in a riding;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To support Bill 106, Prevention of Electoral Fraud Act, 2012, by Bas Balkissoon, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, that would require that voters present proof of Canadian citizenship; require the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario to appoint an independent party to conduct a review of the permanent register of electors within six months after the bill passes and subsequently every five years; allow scrutineers to monitor the process by which voters add their names to the voters list on election day; and forbid vouching, which currently excludes the requirement for legitimate identification.”

I support this petition, I'll sign it and I'll have page Maggie take it to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's cardiologists provide accessible, efficient and cost-effective diagnostic testing services that save, and improve, the lives of thousands of people each year; and

“Whereas the Ontario government's unilateral, punitive changes to the OHIP fee schedule will result in the elimination of these crucial services, thereby leading to a reduction in patient access to care, the lengthening of waiting lists for services, the eradication of high-quality health professional jobs, and an increase in preventable deaths; and

“Whereas the Ontario Association of Cardiologists has presented an alternative, namely, the implementation of new, rigorous standards, which would ensure that cardiac diagnostic tests are done on the right patients, at the right

time, by appropriately trained people, in accredited facilities, thereby reducing the number of inappropriate tests and leading to significant financial savings for the government" of Ontario; "and

"Whereas the proposal has the endorsement of the highly respected Cardiac Care Network of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Direct the Ontario government to repeal the OHIP fee schedule regulation changes filed on May 7, 2012, and instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to work with the Ontario Association of Cardiologists to implement proposed cardiac diagnostic testing standards across the province."

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition, and I thank my constituents for signing it.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt.

"Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and successive governments in those two provinces have never repealed those laws; and

"Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

"Whereas the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and the long term as well as the well-being of its residents;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Simran—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Ottawa—Orléans.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

"Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

"Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

"Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

"Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

"Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

"Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

"Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

"We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

"We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder."

I support this petition and send it forward with Sydney.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I am pleased to share the following petition:

"Whereas Premier McGuinty has imposed fee schedule cuts to family physicians and proposed wage freezes unilaterally, he has therefore alienated the province's family doctors. These actions threaten the future of health care in Ontario and will compound the existing family physician shortage. As wait times for primary care will inevitably increase, so will the frustration of millions of Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the Premier reconsider his decision and return to the negotiating table with the Ontario Medical Association and the province's doctors, thereby working alongside patients and their primary care providers."

I agree with this petition, I affix my signature and I'll give it to Ethan to deliver to the table.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I'm signing this on behalf of the 1,000 dogs that have already been euthanized because of the way they look, and I'm going to give it to Andrew to be delivered to the table.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined;

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent;

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge;

"Whereas, despite being made fully aware of the situation at Ornge, the Minister of Health continues to supply Ornge with funding to transport 20,000 patients by land transport each year, despite the fact that Ornge only carries 3,000 patients;

"Whereas Ornge is being paid an average of \$7,700 for each patient they transfer by air and \$1,700 for each patient they transfer by land ambulance, both clearly amounts vastly in excess of reasonable compensation for the services provided;

"Whereas this latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where \$2 billion in health dollars have been wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I agree with this petition and I'll affix my name to it.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ELECTRICITY SYSTEM OPERATOR ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ D'EXPLOITATION DU RÉSEAU D'ÉLECTRICITÉ DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 11, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to amalgamate the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Power Authority, to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts/ Projet de loi 75, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité pour fusionner la Société indépendante d'exploitation du réseau d'électricité et l'Office de l'électricité de l'Ontario, modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This debate ended, I believe, with the member from Leeds–Grenville. We now go into two-minute rotations, and then we'll continue debate after that.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I will say that when the member from Leeds–Grenville was speaking—the really important thing here is they're creating a mega-organization,

another bureaucracy. We now have two bureaucracies: the IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator, and the Ontario Power Authority—both large, overpaid bureaucracies. Now we're creating the larger one, the combining of the two.

What's going to happen here—and Steve pointed this out very accurately—is they're going to give a severance package to all the people at OPA and IESO, and then they're going to hire them back at this new organization, the OSA, I think it's called, the Ontario Liberal Party—no, whatever. Here's the deal, though: This is another scandalous waste of public money under a Premier McGuinty government that has lost its way in the wilderness of time.

We know that electricity prices have doubled. We know that Ontario has the largest and highest electricity prices in all of Canada and the United States, I believe, with the exception of one jurisdiction.

And I know this: They have this tax credit. The McGuinty government knew they had gone too far, too fast on price, so they gave them some kind of tax credit. Still, the game is up. The seniors of Ontario can hardly open their mail for fear of finding another hydro bill.

I can say that this bill is going to do a lot less, but cost a lot more. Combining two organizations—it's going to take them a year or two to get organized.

I think the member from Leeds–Grenville summarized our argument perfectly—and I'll be voting the way he spoke in his bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. It was a little bit tough for me to remember what he had spoken about, but the member from Durham kind of reminded me.

We presently have those four bureaucracies that look after our electrical system. In Ontario, not that long ago, we used to have one. Then, when the Conservatives were in power, they decided to privatize part of this. They decided to decentralize, and four huge bureaucracies have grown out. Have we seen savings? Well, we all get our hydro bills. I'll leave the customers to tell us how this worked out—it didn't. Ontario pays the highest electricity costs of any other province in Canada. There is no reason for this. I come from northern Ontario. There are more hydroelectric possibilities than we certainly take advantage of. Then when we look at how we use the existing hydro-making facilities, it is a real disgrace, Mr. Speaker.

Is there room for improvement? Absolutely. We don't need four bureaucracies with CEOs who make in the realm of \$1 million, \$500,000, \$650,000 a year. We just have to look next door. Let's look at Manitoba, which did not privatize their electricity, which has everything under one roof. This everything under one roof—they pay about \$300,000 a year for the CEO of all this. Why is it that in Ontario we need four CEOs to do the exact same thing as they do in Manitoba? Not only do we need four, but we pay each and every one of them at least double

what they pay in Manitoba—and when I say double, for some of them it's four times the price that they pay in Manitoba.

There's room for improvement, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Richmond Hill.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this House in response to the member from Durham and the honourable member from Nickel Belt.

I'll just make a few comments about this new agency, which is going to be formed as a result of amalgamation of the two existing agencies.

We are in the process of amalgamating these two agencies, once the bill passes this House, to streamline the process and to save a considerable amount of money. Actually, 15% of the cost of these agencies will be saved as a result of this amalgamation.

It's very interesting to see that the member from Nickel Belt is criticizing this event, while just a few months ago, or about a year ago, they were advocating for the amalgamation of those electricity agencies and corporations. They were asking us to put them all together to create a very huge organization, as we had in the past, actually. We had Ontario Hydro, a huge organization. So it's rather interesting to hear that now they have changed their position.

With regard to hydro power, yes, we are developing hydro power in Ontario. We don't have lots of rivers and dams in Ontario but we are doing our best. Just a few projects, Mr. Speaker, particularly in northern Ontario. We are actually refurbishing about 700 megawatts of hydro power; we are building a tunnel in Niagara Falls that will create about 1.6 billion kilowatt hours of electricity, which will power about 160,000 homes. Also, we are building the Lower Mattagami hydroelectric power station, with 400 megawatts of capacity, which will be producing electricity to power about 150,000 homes.

These are just some of the hydro projects we are in the process of doing. So just in response to the honourable members, this agency—the new agency—will streamline the electricity sector in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I too had the pleasure, like my colleague from Durham, of listening to the member for Leeds–Grenville and his synopsis and thoughts on Bill 75 and, in a broader way, on the mess that the McGuinty Liberals have made of our electricity system here in Ontario.

You'll recall that during the campaign of 2011 we made a commitment that we would get rid of the OPA. The Liberals didn't want to talk about that, but this bill is an admission that it is a mess. They're not going to get rid of it, but they're somehow going to meld the OPA into the IESO and, in a roundabout way, get rid of it, because it's been a boondoggle from the start. It was going to be a virtual agency—not a real agency, just a virtual agency. It turned into one of the biggest money

siphons that the province has ever seen, hundreds of millions of dollars, and it doesn't produce a megawatt of power. It does nothing; it's administrative.

But what it did do—it was a heat shield, like in *Star Trek* when Kirk would say, "Put down the heat shields," or whatever, "The Klingons are coming." When the Conservatives were coming to rip apart Ontario Liberal energy policy, they used the OPA as the shield because force—whatever it was—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Force field.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Force—yes; you know what I'm talking about, Speaker.

It was designed to protect the Minister of Energy. Do you know who the Minister of Energy was when this OPA was conceived? None other than the minister of \$15-billion deficits today—Dwight Duncan. So you've got McGuinty, Duncan and deficits, and the OPA is now going to amalgamate under Bill 75 with the IESO. This is a shell game of the highest order, and you know who's going to get caught? It's going to be the ratepayers and the taxpayers of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Leeds—Grenville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the members for Durham, Nickel Belt, Richmond Hill and also the little *Star Trek* memory from the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

We're talking about Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. Let's make no mistake: It creates a new mega-agency. It empowers the Minister of Energy to meddle even more in the system. It takes away, actually, what little accountability and oversight there is in the system.

I want to make things very clear: Ontarians have seen this before and, quite frankly, they're getting tired of it. This is a mess. They expect some relief, some accountability and some transparency, and they're not getting it with Bill 75.

I do want to make one other observation that I made yesterday. This bill received first reading on April 26.

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It took this government five months to get our committee system in place. They delayed and delayed. They can't manage the minority system. They can't get legislation through. We're now into our third week back, and we're still spinning our wheels.

This government continues to blame the opposition parties. They have no one to blame but themselves for the reason bills are introduced in April and are still at first reading stage. You can't run the Legislature without having a committee system set up, without having an opportunity for the public to provide input, and I'm telling you, I'm off to a meeting here in about three minutes, and when I get out of that meeting, we'd better have a committee system set up. This is a disgrace, for this government to continue to take six months. We've been in office now not even a year, and you are the ones who are delaying this legislation. You can't manage the minority Parliament. You need to smarten up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. I'm lucky I didn't have a petition.

Once again, I'm honoured to be able to stand on behalf of my constituents and voice their concerns on G75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act, 2012. Electricity is an important issue in my riding, as it is in the rest of the province. In fact, for the last person I talked to as I was travelling out of my riding last Sunday, it was the most important topic. I was getting gas at the Dam Depot in Latchford, and I introduced myself to the attendant, who I had never met. Her name was Tracy, and Tracy wasn't particularly interested in politics—she wasn't interested in politics at all—but she was interested in electricity and about how she couldn't afford the price, about how she signed on with an independent energy retailer thinking she would get a break and the price had actually doubled, and how she felt vulnerable and powerless in dealing with one of her basic necessities, electricity. Tracy's story mirrors many of the people in my riding; in fact, complaints about electricity prices, energy retailers and smart meters make up about half of the complaints brought to our office.

Smart meters are my favourite, because I've got my own personal smart meter story. I ran a dairy farm. Our electricity bill was about \$1,500 a month, which we paid every three months, and on the third month, when we got the bill, there was \$5,000 more charged. So I called and they said, "Well, sir, did you check your air conditioner? Did you check your freezer?" I said, "Come on." You can't argue, so we split the difference over the next three months, and I thought, "You know what? We'll see what happens." Next month, I got a credit for \$20,000, so I didn't call.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Because I thought, you know, "They'll figure this out." About a week later, they made a change to my bill. The credit was now \$12,000, so I called, because I had lost \$8,000 in three days. I got the manager, they looked into it, and after about a week they estimated that my electricity bill was, yes, \$5,000 too high. No explanation, no answer, but they put in a new smart meter. But can you imagine all the people who come to my office and are dealing with that?

So my constituents would rather the government put forward bills that they felt were more directly related to their everyday needs, like smart meters or the price, not the merger of two bodies that the majority of them have never heard of. But here we are debating the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. Although people like Tracy might not see the connection, this bill could have a direct impact on people like her. In fact, there is a distinct similarity with the energy retailer and this bill, because what you see at first glance—what the government wants to talk about—and what is actually contained in the bill are two different things.

The bill proposes to merge the OPA and the IESO—to the people at home, two nameless, faceless agencies. The

Ontario Power Authority, for short, is the agency that negotiates the power contracts with the power generators, be they big utilities or microFIT projects. The OPA bureaucracy has ballooned considerably over the years, as has the number of private power contracts. The Independent Electricity System Operator, the IESO, is the agency that actually regulates Ontario's power supply. This is not an easy task, since electricity can't be stored like firewood. Too little and you have a brownout or blackout; too much and you have to get rid of it, in some cases paying people to use it or turning turbines, in our area of the woods, in reverse to burn it up.

In Ontario, we currently have so much power sometimes that we actually pay other provinces and states to use our surplus power. The government pays other jurisdictions to take it, but on the flip side, we pay generators sometimes exorbitant prices, up to 80 cents a kilowatt, to make it. When you buy high and pay to give the power away, somebody has to pay the difference, and that would be us, the Ontario consumers, through the global adjustment fee. To make matters worse, when they pay companies outside the province to take the power, they can't even collect the global adjustment fee from them.

Merging the agency that buys and the agency that regulates the power would seem to make some sense. In fact, it does, and we support that part of the bill. It will hopefully save some money on administration—the government predicts \$25 million. Hopefully, they will be able to produce the documents to prove that. In fact, we in the last election campaign proposed to reintegrate all the electricity agencies except one back under one corporation like Ontario Hydro.

We opposed the initial dismantling and partial privatization of Ontario Hydro by the Conservatives under Mike Harris and the acceleration of the process by the McGuinty Liberals. Both governments have aided in the process by changing the public institution upon which much of the manufacturing and refining backbone of this province is built into a multi-tentacled mishmash of private and public interests that have driven the price so high that it has actually killed many industries in this province.

This is one step in the right direction—not a change of direction; more of a pause in the shift pattern. Hopefully, this is a pause that will indicate a shift into reverse and not a shift into overdrive. But there is a big catch in this proposal. As part of the merger, it eliminates the power authority's power and duty to develop an integrated power system plan, an IPSP—don't you love those short forms?—for approval by the Ontario Energy Board.

The Ontario Energy Board is the watchdog agency and is the one agency that should not be reintegrated. Under the current legislation, the OPA has to submit their energy plans to the Ontario Energy Board so the stakeholders, namely the public, can get a chance to test the government's plans for their effectiveness and efficiency before a hearing at the OEB, if they so choose.

This proposed legislation removes that step and replaces the integrated power supply plan with ministerial

energy plans, and removes the public component that is a very legitimate concern. It's a concern, because we all know what happens when political interference from ministers and others enters into the energy mix. What we get is gas plants that move around like game pieces in Ontario election monopoly—\$180 million here; \$180 million there—all political decisions not based on need or energy strategy but based on election strategy. But who pays the bill? Ontario taxpayers, in money that could be used in much better places for people like Tracy.

Another one: Look at the Green Energy Act, a colossal bungling of a good initiative. Who wouldn't want to have more green energy? Ontario was going to be the new green energy leader: a great political idea. It should have even worked from a policy perspective. It should have. But it was forced on rural Ontario without consultation and by denying local municipalities a say in the planning process. The government has divided much of rural Ontario on this issue just because they focused on votes instead of practical policy.

Furthermore, if you talk to the people who actually regulate the energy balance across the province, the way that the Green Energy Act was implemented was a nightmare because it did not take into account where the energy is needed or where it should be produced. So obviously, the government didn't listen to the people whose job it is to regulate the energy for the province.

The current legislation before us, G75, has glaring examples, which I've just explained, of how lack of public knowledge and participation leads to bad overall energy policy. The ministerial energy plans idea proposed in this legislation would only make a bad situation worse. We need to make decisions on energy policy more transparent, not less. We have to make overall government more transparent, not less, regardless of who's in power. The only way you're going to make things better—the more people know about it when I run my business and somebody else walks in who knows—the thing is, you have to listen to people who know more about your business than you do. When I run my business and somebody walks in who knows more about feeding cows than I do, and he says, "You know, John, you should maybe try this and this"—you look at it and you talk to other people. You don't just say, "Well, I'm going to do it this way because I want to hurt my neighbour."

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The part of this legislation that removes even more public scrutiny from the energy planning process is like a non-starter. It's a non-starter. There are parts of this legislation that are a good step, although a small step, forward. But the part where you take even less public scrutiny is an absolute non-starter.

Look at the trouble we have now trying to get numbers—numbers that should just be given freely. Because, after all, it's all the taxpayers' money. It's not the governing party's money; it's everybody's money. We have to kick and scream to get it. This is making it even

worse. So that part of the legislation has to be drastically amended or killed. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: We understand that Bill 75 has provided an opportunity for the opposition parties to talk about the price points of energy today in the province of Ontario, but I'm not sure they are clearly articulating exactly what has contributed to where we are today. What we do know is that about 5,000 kilometres of transmission capacity in the province of Ontario has been upgraded, and I can tell the people in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan that the long-awaited upgrades to the east-west tie line are one of those projects that are being moved forward as we speak. People have been asking for that tie line to be upgraded for decades.

Most of the costs associated with energy pricing in the province of Ontario today are related to new generation and related to transmission infrastructure upgrades, two things that were completely ignored by both opposition parties when they had the opportunity to govern in the province of Ontario.

We know—it's just been released once again—the new Conservative position. The official opposition, in their white paper, are moving forward once again with their failed privatization experiment. They did it in 2002. We know what happened then. Prices in the province of Ontario went through the roof and the long-term debt immediately spiked, and that is still on the backs of every taxpayer in the province of Ontario today. We're paying it down. We're on track, I think, to have that eliminated within the next five or six years.

We also know that when the third party had the opportunity to govern, electricity prices in the province of Ontario went up by 40% in five years, and for that we received nothing: no investment in new generation, no investment in transmission upgrades. In fact, they went the opposite way. They cancelled the Conawapa project in Manitoba that would have brought in a 20-year contract that had been signed by a Liberal government under Lyn McLeod, a cheap green energy source. The largest transmission infrastructure project in decades would have happened and we would have had a 20-year supply at 40 cents. It was cancelled by the New Democrats—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand up in response to the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane's comments because so much of what he was saying is spot-on. In fact, you'd almost think he was a Conservative from some of his comments.

There's a lack of oversight by the Liberal government today, Speaker, and I totally agree that we need an independent body to provide the oversight. Based on what we've seen, what we've experienced and where we're going, we're going to need a lot of oversight, because, as the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane pointed out, the Green Energy Act is going to be an

absolute mess. It's wreaking havoc within our communities across Ontario. As the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane said, it was a travesty that our local autonomy was totally disregarded when the municipal voice was stripped away from planning proper energy approaches.

I find it also interesting to note that the amalgamation of OPA and OEB was actually suggested because, from our perspective, OPA would be totally gone. They've been nothing but an added layer of bureaucracy that is absolutely not needed, and removing it completely from the mix is the only proper step forward. We have to get our costs under control.

I have three brothers-in-law who are dairy farmers, and they would concur. In fact, just this past weekend, one of my brothers-in-law from Tumberry township mentioned that his cost in terms of running his dairy auction has gone up another third, and it's just ridiculous.

We're not just hearing that from farmers across the countryside. I actually had a letter from Westcast Industries, a manifold manufacturing company, who are very concerned about their energy costs.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, this bill really does not do anything to resolve the issue of the day. We need to bring down energy costs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is always a pleasure to hear my co-worker from Timiskaming—Cochrane talk about any issue, but this issue in particular. I especially enjoyed the story about when the smart—or not-so-smart—meter was installed on to his farm. Do you know how many times this story has played out throughout Ontario? I could tell where the new meters had been installed. We get billed every two months where I live. Two months later, they would line up in my office because so many of those smart meters were faulty.

The process you had to go through to get them to recognize that—is it impossible for a camp where you've turned the breaker off to have a \$5,000 bill for two months? Tell this to my constituent, Diane, who works at Collège Boréal, who brought in her bill. Her camp that she hadn't used, where they turn off the breaker when they leave the camp, received a bill for \$5,000. It has been a year and a half, and it is not settled yet.

I'm glad that my co-worker was able to get through. For some of them, we had some success; we were able to get through. But for some of them, the amount was astronomical—an \$18,000 bill. I will always remember. He's a constituent of mine and lives close to the office. He's in his early 80s; still walks and everything, and still can read. When he put that bill down on my desk, I fell off my chair. We were able to fight that one.

The smart meters are not so smart, and I'm glad my colleague could bring that forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: If passed—and we hope that this Bill 75 is passed—we would be creating one agency

responsible for market operations as a distinct function from procurement and contract management functions, provide opportunities to increase contract efficiency while not impeding the fairness and transparency embedded in the market rules, streamline the system to reduce the administrative burden on local electricity distributors, and be creating an electricity system that's more responsive to changing conditions.

We've heard a lot about what has happened in the electricity system in the last few years. What I, of course, am very fond of talking about is that we are almost out of coal—95% out. We will be out completely in 2014 as the parts per million in carbon go over 400 parts per million, an area that is extremely dangerous for the future of this planet and for the environment that we know and we love.

We're still fighting the battles of the smart meters. That was a tremendous undertaking. It's a platform that we need to manage our use, to encourage conservation—I would think the third party should be interested in conservation. It lets families see what their usage is. We want to go forward to do better planning and do better management of our electricity system. This is now all installed.

I must say that of the 40,000 users in Orléans, I have not had one comment in my office in the last year on smart meters. I have not. This was a difficult undertaking, a huge undertaking, but it's probably the best thing we've done from a point of view of conservation, getting people to understand electricity.

This is great—saving this \$25 million; getting the planning all together. I hope everyone supports this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timiskaming—Cochrane has two minutes.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to thank the members from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Huron—Bruce, Nickel Belt and Ottawa—Orléans for their comments on my comments.

For the member from Ottawa—Orléans, that must just show one of the differences between Ottawa and northern Ontario, because we have a lot of troubles with smart meters. I'm just happy that mine, for some reason, turned the other way, because that's the only—when I owed \$5,000: "I'm sorry, sir; there's nothing we can do. We could just split it up over three months." You know what? I didn't have the \$5,000. I ran a business, but I didn't have \$5,000. There was nothing they could do. But when I called back, I said, "Excuse me, but I have this \$12,000 credit." All of a sudden, they looked into it.

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For those people who come to my office and people who come to France's office, I really have sympathy for them, because it's a really bad feeling when—"I'm sorry, sir. I know it's \$5,000 higher, but did you check your air conditioner?" The worst, most inefficient air conditioner in the world can't use \$5,000 of electricity in three months—and I don't have an air conditioner.

As far as what happened 20 years ago, let's talk about what's happening today. Let's talk about why this bill is

taking away public scrutiny from electrical planning when we know—look at the problems we've had when we take public scrutiny from air ambulance, when we take public scrutiny from anything, and yet here the government is putting forward a bill with—we're going to save a few bucks, supposedly, which maybe they might. On the flip side, we're going to take away the last few vestiges of public scrutiny we have in the energy sector. Let's talk about that. Let's not talk about what happened 20 years ago; let's talk about what's really happening today with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act.

Before I get into it, I just want to comment on the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane. Smart meters: I've got stacks of inquiries like that. There are so many going in that it's months before they get answers because the level of complaints is so high. If you don't want to believe us on some things, at least believe us on that, and look into it. It's a big, big problem, and it's hurting people who can't afford to pay their bills.

Anyway, back to Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. The bill will amend the Electricity Act to allow for the merger of the Independent Electricity System Operator and the Ontario Power Authority to form the Ontario Electricity System Operator, or OESO—a long thing, but just in case anybody is watching at home, we thought we should do this preliminary. Anyway, it would look after both market and procurement functions.

The bill claims the merger will save \$25 million. Even if that were true, which I strongly doubt because the Liberals throw out figures that aren't true continuously, it's really quite a drop in the ocean compared to the overall costs of the Ontario energy sector.

We believe that the Ontario Power Authority should not be merged; it should be scrapped altogether, and we said that all through the campaign last year. It was formed seven years ago as a 15-person transitional body created by this government to manage Ontario's energy supply.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: How big is it now?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Just about every other board and agency that this government has set up—a Frankenstein monster was created. Today, this transitional board, as my colleague from Huron—Bruce asked, is now a 235-person permanent entity, with 87 people earning in excess of \$100,000, while the CEO is paid over \$570,000.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Shameful.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's ridiculous. In just seven years, it has burned through over \$375 million in expenditures and its annual expenses have risen from \$14 million in 2005 to \$76.4 million today—figures that just blow your mind.

This legislation actually is going to further erode the transparency in government. It puts more power in the hands of the minister and puts him and his closely guarded agency above scrutiny. Do the names Samsung and Omge ring a bell here?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Oh, yes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Oh, yes.

While we're on the subject of transparency, when are we going to get the full cost of that politically motivated cancellation of the Mississauga power plant? I know it was a nice gesture to do so you could save four Liberal seats—or how about even the cost of the Oakville plant to save another seat?

This bill does not address the major problems which Ontario is facing with regard to its electricity sector. We've all heard of the spiralling costs of energy in Ontario. It has driven hundreds of businesses out of the province looking for more competitive energy rates. These companies have thus taken thousands of jobs with them. They don't use as much electricity either, so I guess that's why our electricity use is down. You only have to look at the mill closures across northern Ontario to see the seriousness of this situation. They can't compete with the lower energy costs that are available to them in Quebec, Manitoba or the USA. For average hard-working Ontarians, hydro bills have become this albatross around their necks as they struggle just to make ends meet during these difficult economic times.

As I've said on many occasions, even I think this morning or yesterday in the Legislature, the number one thing that comes into my constituency office is countless calls, emails, letters and visits from residents who are desperate. They're struggling to keep the OPG wolves away and keep the lights on. However, in many cases, while they're just trying to buy food or clothes, some of them can't even stay in their houses—they're having to sell their houses—and that's certainly from a lot of seniors who just can't afford the price of this. I think that's disgraceful.

Since 2003, energy costs have doubled, and the costs are projected to rise another 46% by 2014—outrageous.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Unaffordable. People won't be able to live.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. This government is hell-bent for leather to continue this proliferation of obscenely expensive wind and solar plants despite universal local opposition from individuals and municipalities, and the Premier and the Minister of Energy don't seem to want to listen. My colleague from Huron-Bruce was up for an open house for WPD in the south part of the city of Kawartha Lakes in my riding, where over 600 residents came out to protest against the wind developments.

One of those developments is actually going to be in the Oak Ridges moraine. There is absolutely no sense to this. I wrote to the Minister of Energy, who is here in the Legislature, on July 2. A proposed wind turbine on the Oak Ridges moraine? I mean, we're against all the wind turbines that the communities do not want, because the municipalities were not consulted, but just look at the one

in the Oak Ridges moraine for a minute. Are you really going to put an industrial wind turbine on the Oak Ridges moraine, a protected area? It makes absolutely no sense at all.

I know the government has adjusted to say that any of the projects going forward would have to have municipal authority, but what about the ones that are already in the pipe? What about the ones that don't even make sense, the ones I just mentioned on the Oak Ridges moraine that we're fighting? We're fighting all of them, but really just commenting on this one that's proposed for the Oak Ridges moraine right now.

The government dismisses out of hand these poor people who have real concerns that have surfaced. If you are having health effects—even the federal government has asked for a study. But having health effects and saying, "Put a moratorium on it until the studies are done"—you won't even accept that from us over here. The federal government is going ahead and doing that. You just dismiss those people like there are no ill health effects. You're dismissing them like it doesn't matter to you, and I think that's just unacceptable in this province.

There are 15 proposed wind turbines just in the city of Kawartha Lakes alone in my area, some near residences and some near schools. This green agenda they want to keep driving ahead—I remember when George Smitherman stood up and said this Green Energy Act wouldn't increase your bill by 1%. That classic moment in the Ontario Legislature: not by 1%. I'm sure it's on tape somewhere—all his motions.

But when we bring these topics up to the Minister of Energy again and again, he just dismisses them out of hand, saying that the PC Party is in favour of coal power. Mr. Speaker, all the parties have been on the record saying, "Close the coal-fired plants." They campaigned on that in 2003 for a date of 2007—whatever. They changed the date for the closure of the coal plants four times—four times—but they tend to forget that when he gets up with his mantra, "The PCs want dirty coal." Mantra, mantra, mantra. Real people, real problems: He doesn't want to listen to it. And it was the Conservative government that first ordered the coal-powered plants to be shut down.

Mr. John O'Toole: We were honest about it. We said 2014; they said 2007.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, absolutely. They've changed the date. They spin things. The McGuinty government would tell you that wind and solar have replaced coal in Ontario, another fairy tale. Coal accounted for 24.7% of total power in 2002, and now it's 2.7%. The reduction in coal has been the direct result of an increase in nuclear and gas-fired energy. It has nothing whatsoever to do with wind and solar.

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I'd like to quote my colleague from Nipissing, from his remarks on May 8: "When you toss around phrases like 'dirty coal,' which stifles naysayers; and put a green label on it ... you've got a perfect storm for procedural abuses, failed fiscal oversight and a gross misuse of

taxpayer dollars," which is what they're finally saying, that the OPA is ineffective and costly—but it's a long way to come. But the Minister of Energy would also have us to believe there's a mad dash to wind and solar energy that has created an abundance of jobs. I say, jobs on what planet? They're not here. They throw out numbers that are not substantiated at all.

Interjection: Industry people agree with you.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. In the Auditor General's report for 2011, he stated that in other jurisdictions that have tried to go this route, for every job created through green energy projects, between "two and four jobs are ... lost in other sectors of the economy because of higher electricity prices." Well, that's what we're seeing in Ontario. They might not want to see it, but that is what is occurring in the province of Ontario.

In Ontario, wind and solar energy is not always there when you need it. The wind has got to blow and the sun has got to shine. Consequently, you need backup energy sources that are required to maintain a steady, reliable output. Again, the Auditor General's report goes on to say, "According to the study used by the ministry and the OPA, 10,000 megawatts of electricity from wind would require an additional 47% of non-wind power, typically produced by natural-gas-fired generation plants, to ensure continuous supply."

Although they're faintly attempting to say the OPA is working, merging is not going to solve the problems that we need to get solved.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened intensely to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, and I always like the way she frames things in terms of, "I think of what the government's policies are doing to families."

When I think of it myself, I think her point was well taken when she used the barometer of the reduction in coal, the whole argument about who would close the coal plants that produce carbon dioxide emissions. She came up with a very informative number, which was that at one point coal represented about 24%, 25% of the generation of electricity fuel usage, to produce electricity, and now it's down to, I think she said, 2%. Well, I don't attribute it to their policies. I attribute it to their failure in the economy, because really, if you look, coal is used or was used as a source of peaking power. When you ramp up your generation, you use coal. Now, what happened is, the economy has moved slowly down until there's about half a million people or more, and families, out of work. That's really what happens. And when the economy goes down, the energy that's required at those peaking times, when coal, and pulp and paper—and when steel and automobiles are being produced, they need this extra energy. Now they're not using the coal anymore because there's no economy. The industrial economy has moved out of Ontario. That's the real statement about this policy.

This Bill 75, as has been said before, forms a new bureaucracy, much like the LHINs. It's a super-bureau-

cracy of electrical experts, the OPA and the IESO, and it's just not the right thing to do at this time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock speak about what this bill will mean to her and to her constituency, and she makes a lot of good points. I mean, she talks about how the amount of money in the growth in those bureaucracies is rather phenomenal. When she quotes numbers that an agency goes from a budget of \$14 million to a budget of \$76.4 million, when she quotes salaries of CEOs that are \$570,000 a year, when she quotes about an agency that now has 237 employees, and the list goes on and on, we all know what bureaucracy means. It means a lot of money. And at the end of the day, who is stuck with the bill? Well, it's the 13.5 million people who live in Ontario that pay for all of this.

Is there a need to streamline that bureaucracy? Absolutely. It should never have been conceived in the first place, I would tell you. But now that it's there, should we streamline the bureaucracy? Absolutely. There are major savings to be had there.

But then comes the poison pill. They will be willing to streamline the bureaucracy so far, bring them under an umbrella, but they will take away the citizens' right to have input into the power plan. This is completely wrong. Have they not heard what's going on in Ontario? Have you not gone to any rural Ontario communities? Those people are screaming to the point where they're hoarse, but nobody listens. Nobody listens to what they have to say. You cannot move forward when you leave behind the voice of so many people. People need to be heard. This bill will go backward—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thanks to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. A couple of pieces I need to address, though, in her comments.

She said that since we've come to government in 2003, energy costs have gone up by X—I think she said doubled or tripled or something. What the Conservatives don't tell you about where we are today compared to where we were in 2003 is that when they were in government, they had artificially capped the price of electricity that appeared on your hydro bill. It was a political football that they didn't want to deal with, so they artificially capped the cost of electricity that showed up on your hydro bill. And what were they doing with that other piece? You weren't paying it on your hydro bill. It got transferred to your tax bill in terms of the long-term debt. So when she says it's gone from here to here, what she's not telling you is that the starting point in 2003 actually should have been five or six cents a kilowatt hour, but they wouldn't deal with it, just like they didn't deal with transmission, just like they didn't deal with generation. She ignored it; their party ignored it. Now, it may have been before she was here, but the truth of it is that when we came in, the ceiling should have been

higher already, but they capped it artificially because they didn't want to deal with the issue. That is a fact, plain and simple.

The other mistake she continues to make is linking hydro costs to the loss of forestry jobs in northern Ontario: another complete misnomer. I've offered to debate that with anybody, any time, including the former leader of the third party, Howard Hampton; he never showed up. I still have that standing offer in terms of that false connection to the loss of forestry jobs. I'm still happy to do that any time anybody wants.

Speaker, as we stand here today, the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate program will make AbiBow, now Resolute Forest Products, in my riding, along with \$10 million from our government for a cogen facility there, the lowest-cost large pulp and paper mill not only in their fleet but I think perhaps—and I could be wrong; it could be checked—in Canada, but certainly in their entire fleet here in Ontario compared to Quebec.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to dive into this debate today with my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. As always, she has done a tremendous job outlining her concerns for her constituents, which she has consistently done since 2003. She's done a fantastic job, and she has been able to clearly articulate the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party's and our caucus's concern with this government and its handling of the energy files since they've been in office over this past dark—very dark—decade.

Now, I can't help but comment to the previous Speaker from Thunder Bay-Atikokan, I believe. Yes, that's the right riding name. You know, he wants to debate anyone, any time, anywhere. Well, that's what we're doing. I don't know if he is aware of that, but that's actually what we're doing right now. We're having a debate. And I can tell him from having spoken to many of our party members in the north, particularly the king of the north, our very own Vic Fedeli from North Bay—he has told me that the impact of the global adjustment and the energy plan that this government has brought in has forced jobs out of the north.

But don't think it's just happening in the north, Speaker. I can tell you in my own Nepean-Carleton riding, I've been to Bells Corners—in fact, I took Vic Fedeli to Bells Corners—where I talked to business owners who told me very clearly that this summer they couldn't hire summer students because the cost of hydro became too expensive. I talked to seniors this summer who are telling me that they couldn't put air conditioning on and in the winter they're concerned about putting their heating on. Why? Because our energy bills in this province are far too high; they're not affordable. If that member wants to debate any member on this side, I can tell him we're game on. That's why we're here; that's what we're doing. We'll meet you anywhere you want to debate, and we'll win it.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to thank the members from Oshawa, Nickel Belt, Thunder Bay-Atikokan and Nepean-Carleton for their comments.

When we campaigned—I gave you the figures of how much the OPA has cost the people of Ontario—we said it should be scrapped. It kind of blows you away, the figures that have gone through. It's burned through \$375 million in expenditures, and annual expenses have risen from \$14 million in 2005 to \$76.4 million today, under your government.

And if you think that high energy prices aren't driving businesses out of Ontario, if you don't think that that occurs, you are sadly mistaken. Please go to businesses in your riding. You can't say that it's making them competitive; it is not. It is driving businesses out of the province of Ontario. There are tons of examples. If the member hasn't heard enough in all the debate that has gone on in this Legislature to prove that, then maybe he should read Hansard at bedtime.

This is somewhat of an admission, as the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke said earlier—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't need sarcasm, and the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan knows he's out of line—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I am correct.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Your last warning.

Continue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm so glad that the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan is so engaged, and there'll be more speakers up shortly, right till 6 o'clock, and he can engage with them.

But, really, even Don Drummond, your own hand-picked consultant, tried to explain to you that the link between electricity prices and economic performance requires us to review the energy policy in this province of Ontario.

This bill is a small step. It certainly does not go far enough. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm out of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this Bill 75, the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. We've heard from many of my colleagues in this House, and I want to add to their discussions my concerns and all of our concerns on this bill.

This proposed legislation is designed to implement the merger of the Ontario Power Authority, the OPA, and the Independent Electricity System Operator, the IESO. The government is also making wholesale changes to energy planning and procurement.

While we support the consolidation of Ontario's fragmented hydro agency system and agree with the government's intention to reduce waste and elimination by merging the two agencies, we still have some concerns with the approach of this bill. The way they've gone about doing this is Bill 75 removes the independent planning and review required by the present supply planning regime. This is something that the NDP does not support.

Although the merger to form the Ontario Electricity System Operator may be a positive step, we in the NDP feel strongly that by eliminating the current integrated power system plan, the opportunity for public and stakeholder participation in energy planning is greatly reduced. We heard from the Minister of Energy, in their presentation about what their bill will do, but they failed to outline that this bill will exclude the public's ability to scrutinize power planning in Ontario.

As MPPs, we legislate and are accountable to our constituents, to the public, but it appears that the Liberal government continues their effort to shut out the public from this and many other debates. Unfortunately, this seems to be commonplace—a government who keeps acting as though they have a majority mandate from the public, when they don't, as they currently do not—creates legislation making it difficult for the public to partake in the decision and with no accountability or oversight. This is what they would like.

Yesterday my colleague the member from Toronto-Danforth explained to the House that in the past, to assess the power plans for Ontario, one needed an environmental assessment. Something wasn't acted on. To me, this seems as though it would be extremely helpful. You would think it would be common sense, before moving ahead with any projects, that speaking to individuals affected, consulting with experts, doing background research and presenting the facts to the decision-makers would be highly beneficial, not to mention that it gives us the knowledge to make the right decisions with all the right facts. For a plan this large, for the amalgamation of something of this importance, the NDP believes that such consultation should absolutely be required. This bill diminishes the extent to which we assess power planning in Ontario. Yet again, it gives the minister more power to determine the parameters of the question for the OEB. We know, from many clear examples this year, what happens when you give ministers more power to shut out the public.

The bill removes OPA's power and duty to develop an integrated power system plan for approval by the Ontario Energy Board and the OEB's power and duty to review the plan for economic prudence, cost-effectiveness and regulatory compliance. They want to replace the integrated power system with ministerial energy plans. The minister must consult with the OEB and refer the plan to the OEB, but we have completely lost the step in which the independent review is undertaken. In this set-up, stakeholders lose the ability to test, in a proceeding before the OEB, the government's energy procurement plans and the consequent effect of those plans on rates.

I'm no expert on energy cost-effectiveness or energy plans, but that's exactly why I see the value in having these independent reviews and assessments—something that isn't in this bill but will become more of an issue over the next few months with the consolidation of the power companies and energy service providers and local distribution companies. We will hear more about this when the minister's panel reports back to us. But again, it is not mentioned in this bill.

In Algoma-Manitoulin, what does this mean for small or rural communities like Chapleau, who have their own local power company? Will they be forced to amalgamate with one of the larger northern cities? What will this look like in terms of good jobs in northern rural communities? I don't know the answers, and I am sure that you may not know either. But again, that's another reason why we should be including all of our stakeholders in this decision.

Recently I have met with a company in my riding who have a reusable energy project they have been trying to move forward. They have been trying to set up a meeting with the minister about their project. What will happen to these projects in a larger system that removes the public and stakeholders from the table? How will they know what the numbers are? Whether we are investing in new energy or spending millions in nuclear, some of these folks may have some great ideas, ones that could save us money and be better for our environment. But with this bill, we will never know. "Do we care? We know best." That's the attitude this government has.

I can't agree with this government on this one. We may not like all those meetings. Some of those ideas may be far-fetched and probably are, but we owe it to the Ontario taxpayers to investigate at great length and protect our plans or even look at alternatives to what is going to cost us billions of dollars. If we could do things right the first time—yes, it could take longer if we do our background work, if we do the research and ask all the questions, not just the ones we want to ask. Then, together, we can make the right decisions for stakeholders and the public.

I'm sure that all of us here, and more specifically this government, want to avoid being called to testify in another committee or spend hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on inquiries due to lack of oversight by ministers or ministries. We don't want to make poor decisions again and again just because we don't want to do the job right the first time. We can avoid all this and likely save time and money in the long run. So can we all agree, just this one time, to get it done at the beginning, the first time?

1640

While we all have critic portfolios on which we all are supposed to be the lead or expert in our area, I find it impossible that anyone in this Legislature can really, truly have the knowledge of the collective, the more wholesome, all-encompassing knowledge we gain when we are all included in the discussion, when we reach out and ask people for their opinions and their concerns.

You know, I'm a father of two lovely young boys—actually, two very big boys—who use a lot of hydro, by the way.

Interjection: They take a lot of showers.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You wouldn't believe the amount of time they spend in the shower.

You know, they've made mistakes, but they've made mistakes under my eyes, and I've watched them over the years. I'm a very patient father, a very loving father. But I let them make their mistakes. They learn from those mistakes, and I want them to learn from those mistakes.

But we're all elected here. We're all adults. We're all professionals sent here by our constituents to do the right thing, to make the right decisions, to take the time to study what needs to be studied, to analyze, to question, to challenge ourselves to get it right, because we have a lot of people looking at us to make sure we're getting it right.

I think we can all agree that this government has made mistakes—substantial ones—and I think it's about time that this government starts learning from those mistakes. Let's do it right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his comments. The bill, of course, is about trying to achieve some more cost savings in the energy sector. I remind people, especially northerners, about two significant pieces we have already brought forward that help on the bill they see in their homes every month or every two months. The Ontario clean energy benefit takes 10% off the bottom line of your energy bill every time it arrives at your home—fully 10%. That's been in effect for about a year and a half now. And for northerners only, the northern Ontario energy tax credit is income-based for a single person who has a primary residence up to a maximum of \$130, and for a couple up to a maximum of \$200. So there are some significant pieces in place as well as on the industrial side, which I spoke to earlier.

Speaker, I just want to make one point in the brief, little time I have this afternoon. When the conversation continually points to the price of energy and the job situation in the province of Ontario, I ask people to simply respond to one question: Why would Cliffs Natural Resources, which represents the largest potential mining find in the last 100 years in the province of Ontario, make a decision to locate in Ontario a smelter that is, as explained to me, the largest energy user you can find in the industrial world? Apparently, they use just a tremendous amount of energy, and yet Cliffs has made the decision to locate their smelter in Ontario. We heard before they made the decision that it was not going to happen, it was going to Quebec, it was going to Manitoba. They've announced they are locating it here.

So when people want to talk about jobs related to energy pricing, they need only to stand, look in the camera and explain, especially for northerners, how it is that the largest industrial appliance, a smelter, is going to

be built in Ontario and create 450 jobs during construction and 450 jobs during operation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I believe the member from Algoma-Manitoulin spoke with some insight, coming from the north, and spoke in a very practical way about this large bureaucracy that's being created. I think it's a bit of a distraction by the member from the Liberal side there—what's his riding? Anyway, I believe he tried to get off topic a bit by deflecting it.

He should talk directly about the bill, because really, in all honesty, it's creating another layer of bureaucracy. Members should read section 25—most of the bill is section 25. This new board that's being appointed—these people are going to be Liberal insiders.

What are they actually doing? If you look at section 25, the OESO, which it's going to be called, "may establish and charge fees to recover ..." and it goes on to a list.

Now, "fees" is the new codified word for tax. They don't refer to it as a charge. It's a tax. There are several sections: "May recover costs of procurement contracts"—fees "Board deemed to approve recovery"—fees. "May" be audited—not "shall" be audited; "may" be audited. And "The OESO shall submit to the minister such reports and information" as required.

So it's their gang of appointees that is going to be charging more money when the system itself right now is in chaos. If you look at it in a functional way—and, Mike, you know this—they've got the whole system completely screwed up. Basically they've got the generation, this new—I should say that the power bill itself is a mystery. Now this company, Cliffs Resources, is not going to pay the regular fee. They're not going to be paying the global adjustment. They'll have two fees for their friends. Now that may, in policy, be the right thing, but this bill, which we should address, is dealing with a new bureaucracy which charges more money for everything.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was very interesting to listen to my colleague the member from Algoma-Manitoulin explain his view of what he thinks Bill 75 will do, and I must say that I agree with everything he said. I'm not sure that I can help him with the problem of his two boys in the shower. I myself experienced the same problem when they were growing up. All I can tell you is, eventually they grow out of long showers. It just takes a number of months, sometimes years before this process has run its course. Just be patient; they will grow up.

But on a more serious note, he talks about some of the stakeholders who wanted to get into green energy. This is an issue that happens throughout my riding, where we have vast areas of unorganized land. We also have 33 little communities in Nickel Belt where people would be interested in participating in green energy, but they can't connect to the grid.

I can give you the example of the church in Capreol. Capreol is better known as the home of Eli Martel, who is well known around here. The church in Capreol was very interested in putting solar panels on its roof and participating in green energy. They happen to be facing due south. The structure was there. They certainly had the manpower because they have a lot of their congregation who have trades who could have helped out. But then we found out that although they qualify for everything, they can't connect to the grid, so it's all for none. So I agree with what my colleague has said: There's room for improvement. Let's get this right the first time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's always a pleasure to follow my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin. Whether I agree with him or not, I do admire the way in which he does the debate. It's a good example around here, where sometimes it gets a little bit heated. As we seem to be discussing the propensity of his two boys to take hot showers, I've just got to weigh in with one more thing: It beats the alternative.

A lot of what's going on here is a means of fixing a mess inherited by a failed attempt by the Conservatives to take apart Ontario Hydro and break it up into a bunch of little pieces. And we ended up in Ontario with the worst of both worlds. It didn't privatize things, and we ended up with this mishmash of different agencies.

Now what this particular legislation does is, it puts together two particular agencies, the Ontario Power Authority with the Independent Electricity System Operator. The whole idea is to create a single efficient organization, and the bottom line here is that it's going to save consumers about \$25 million each year.

This is where I think we should be going—and if my colleagues over on the Conservative side tend to be vociferous about it, it's because they have no plan. If you have no plan, the first thing you do is you fire the planners, and that's exactly what they're proposing here. They say, "Scrap the whole lot," and they're simply firing the planners.

1650

If you've got as complex and as detailed an electricity system as Ontario does, you've got to have some degree of planning in here. But it makes a lot of sense to bring together both the Ontario Power Authority and the Independent Electricity System Operator, all under the same roof, and that's really all this thing does: It saves the taxpayer 25 million bucks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Algoma-Manitoulin has two minutes.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'd like to thank the members from Thunder Bay-Atikokan, Durham, Nickel Belt and Mississauga-Streetsville for their comments on my comments that I had earlier. I'm glad you guys share my concerns that I have with my two boys. I have some good news. They've grown up quite quickly. They're going to

be going to college, and then they're going to become somebody else's problem.

Interjection: Dream on, Michael.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, I know. The problem becomes more expensive, that's all. I think we're going to be talking about tuition on the next question when I talk about my boys.

Anyway, the point that I wanted to stress is—it may have been heard just a little bit, and that was getting this right; getting this decision that we're looking at right, and making it right, and not just part right but all of it right. We can do that.

I just want to allude to the member from Thunder Bay, who talked about the successes and the great things that are going to be happening in the Ring of Fire. There's another instance where we're not doing it right from the beginning. We're not talking to all of our stakeholders, particularly the biggest stakeholders there, which are our First Nations in that area. We're talking to some, but we're not doing it right. We're doing it in reverse. We're making an announcement; then we're consulting with them. That is not doing it right.

To the member from Durham: Although I'm very happy that he agreed with some of my comments, privatizing our hydro system is not doing it right. We need to have the proper consultation in order to get this right. That's what I was trying to stress in my comments that I was making.

Eliminating the scrutiny that we can have through this process is not doing it right. Keeping the public and our stakeholders from being involved in this process is not doing it right. We can do it right. Let's get it right this time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Mr. Speaker, you said that with such enthusiasm that I'm hoping you're going to listen intently to what I have to say today.

I'm pleased to be joining the debate today on Bill 75, which is the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. One of the things, when I was a university professor, that I didn't like so much when I was reading students' reports was to listen to all these acronyms: OPA, IESO—we can talk about all of them in energy; there seems to be a lot of them. In a sense, we're getting rid of a couple and starting a new one, which is the OESO. I'm not sure if we're supposed to phonetically pronounce that or not, but we shall soon see.

During debate today, I remember listening quite fondly to the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, who had an appreciation for force fields. I don't know if Star Trek had a force field, or Superman, but we certainly were engaged in a discussion of paranormal forces, and certainly that's interesting with respect to that.

But he stated something else when he was trying to make a metaphor there, and that was that the OPA is seen to be a force field, something that the Liberal government hides behind whenever they have a problem with the Ministry of Energy. When he said that, I took immediate

notice of some of the work that we were doing when we were in the estimates committee.

In the estimates committee, we had the Ministry of Energy and the Minister of Energy before us for 15 hours. We also had a procedural motion—several procedural motions—which we spent more than seven hours debating. So we talked about, in estimates, the Ministry of Energy for more than 20 hours, probably approaching 25 hours, to get to the bottom of what's happened in that ministry. Certainly, in the course of doing our work in that committee, we were able to extract some information but not all.

I remember, during the work at committee—we had two motions that we were debating—we asked the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority to release documents—all the documents, in fact—for the Oakville and Mississauga power plants and the moving of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants. The question that I have, Mr. Speaker, is, what would happen and how would that have proceeded if Bill 75 had been passed before we met at estimates? Would they have acted in the same way, or would they have acted differently? Would they have given us the documents at our disposal, or would they not have?

I'm very interested in this conversation because certainly, in the course of doing the estimates and trying to extract the information, we received a letter from the Ontario Power Authority and a letter—

Mr. Bob Delaney: You are not talking about the bill.

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm talking about what would happen if the two had been merged prior to meeting at estimates, which is exactly relevant to the bill at hand because we have that here.

I notice that we have two letters here, one that's dated on May 30, the other dated on May 30—one from the Ontario Power Authority and one from the Ministry of Energy. I note with great interest that both of them have similar language. Let's hear them. On the 30th this is to the member for Beaches–East York: “I respect the authority of the committee and its interest in receiving this information,” said the Minister of Energy. The Ontario Power Authority, at the same time, suggests that, “The OPA respects the authority of the committee and its interest in receiving this information.” It's almost word for word. It seems like these organizations that are supposed to be at arm's length to the government actually are joined at the hip. They're saying the same things.

I'm very curious to know, when we see the two organizations merge, if we're going to see the same sort of thing; if they continue to be joined at the hip. It's an important question that we've asked. Certainly all the documents that we've requested haven't been brought forward in a timely manner. As you know, certainly we've asked the Speaker to rule on a point of privilege in terms of getting those documents to us.

With respect to the actual merging of the two bodies, it seems interesting that there's a conversion of sorts; that the Liberals now feel they should have less bureaucracy in the province of Ontario. That's a good thing. I

welcome the fact that they have woken up to the reality that the bureaucracy is getting too big and that we have to come up with ways of reducing it. Of course, it doesn't go nearly as far as what we would have liked to see. We have been advocating for the abolition of the Ontario Power Authority since before the last election. That's where we continue to stand. Let's get rid of some of these layers of bureaucracy rather than merge them.

We believe that the Ontario Power Authority should not be merged; it should be scrapped altogether. One of the reasons for that is that it was supposed to be a transitional body, a body that was supposed to have about a dozen people. It has turned into a monstrosity of a bureaucracy. Today, rather than having the 15 people that it was originally slated to have, it's a bureaucracy, a 235-person permanent entity, where 87 people—87 people, Mr. Speaker—earn over \$100,000 and the CEO earns over \$570,000. That's a lot of money for a transitional agency.

That is at the crux of what's happening in the province of Ontario. We have always been advocating for restraint in government spending. We know that the credit rating agencies are demanding it. We notice that the government seems to want to move down that path. But if we're really serious about reining in government spending, let's talk about the costs that this would save. Over the last seven years, the expenditures of the OPA have been over \$375 million. Its expenses have risen from \$14 million in 2005 to \$76.4 million today. That's the growth.

There was a concept that we talked about in public administration when I was teaching. It's called self-absorption. Self-absorption is a concept whereby the folks that are working in a bureaucracy tend to be self-fulfilling. They're more interested in growing their own organization before putting the interests of public service first.

1700

One of the reasons why we have set up our democratic system the way we have is to combat self-absorption, to correct the problem that bureaucracies are self-fulfilling, that they're self-absorbed, that they always seek to grow, and one way we can do that is by eliminating the OPA.

Interjection: Good advice.

Mr. Rob Leone: Well, I think it's good advice too, and certainly there has been a lot of need. This is an important time in the province of Ontario. We face a fiscal crisis of epic proportions where we have a \$15-billion deficit, and if we don't change course, that deficit number is going to double. That debt that we have in the province of Ontario, currently standing at about \$264 billion, will go up to \$411 billion, as Don Drummond states. If we aren't going to address our fiscal crisis, if we aren't going to rein in government spending, if we aren't going to show that restraint that's badly needed here in the province of Ontario, we are heading down the wrong path. We need that change, and we need it soon.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker—as I notice I don't have very much time left—I do want to touch upon some of the things that other members have stated with respect

to their constituents' concerns in the Ministry of Energy. The reason I want to bring these up is because they're important. This is what our constituents are saying day by day.

We've heard today about smart meters. Smart meters are certainly an interesting topic. I have a nurse in my riding who works the afternoon shift. When is she going to be using most of her energy consumption? When the prices of energy are too high. She has complained that she's been negatively affected by smart meter pricing and time-of-use pricing simply as a result of her employment. She can't change that. It's part of what she does. Now, I feel for her. She's a person working hard, trying to provide for herself and her family, who has been negatively affected by a decision just because of the shift that she happens to work at that hospital.

I also have a meat packing facility in the city of Cambridge, the township of North Dumfries, actually, that has had to close because of the excessive energy costs. Cambridge Meat Packers is one of those organizations that have closed, not employing the 55 people that it once did, because the competition with other provinces and other jurisdictions has lower energy prices putting them out of business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Cambridge. I agree with some of the things he said, and I really appreciate the reasoning behind his arguments. But one thing—and there were some comments from the other side that the beginning of his argument had nothing to do with the bill. In fact, it had everything to do with the bill. Because what this bill is trying to do—it's trying to save a little bit of money, but what it's really trying to do is make it even harder to get information regarding the government's energy plans. And not just this. If it's passed, it will be regardless of who is in government in the future, because government also seems to have a tendency to get more secretive as it moves along, and that's what this bill is kind of doing. Look how much trouble they had at the estimates committee trying to get some information, and by the member from Cambridge's comments, they didn't get it all. That was with the current legislation. With this proposed legislation, there will be one less step in public hearings, because now instead of the IPSP, we will have ministerial energy plans. So, you know, we're not sure that's the way to be going. We should be going with more transparency, not less.

As far as bureaucracies being not only self-sustaining but growing like—

Mr. Rob Leone: Self-absorbing.

Mr. John Vanthof: Self-absorbing. I've never heard of that theory before. But self-absorbing or growing like a tree—you know what? They probably have that.

But where I do somewhat disagree with the member from Cambridge is that I don't believe in slash and burn, just cut. We have to look at what each bureaucracy is doing, and if they're doing something significant, some-

thing worthwhile, then we have to keep the best of the best. I think that's where we differ. But as far as the one thing I think we are agreeing on on this side of the House, we have to be as transparent as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I remember watching from the other side of the Ontario-Manitoba border. When I was mayor of Winnipeg, we had a hydro utility which we were selling. This was at the time when the Harris government was downloading health and social services onto municipalities as we were uploading them in Manitoba, and I saw the huge financial impact.

But it was interesting because I remember seeing studies on the condition of transmission lines. I remember under the previous government a couple of things. Ontario then had the most under-invested-in transmission lines. The government that the member speaking right now, from Cambridge, is a part of saw the massive divestment of the quality of that. So not only were there load-bearing problems, as the member from Nickel Belt mentioned, the system was in a free fall, because it was easy to hide disinvestment in transmission lines from taxpayers and leave the bill for a future government.

The other thing they did was they absolutely collapsed the value of public hydro assets. I remember reading it because I saw a presentation by the financial officers of Canada showing that they managed to create \$8 billion in liability for the taxpayers of Ontario through collapsing and deregulation—immediately inflated an \$8-billion obligation with no capital investment—truly amazing. I am still waiting for the party opposite to actually rationalize what was arguably, from any objective third party, the most irrational, expensive, disastrous move in the history of Canadian energy policy. You have never apologized for it; you have never explained it. It is legendary. When I was mayor of Winnipeg, you were used as the textbook example in the energy field of exactly what not to do.

If you ever really want to get into this debate, as my friend from Nepean—Carleton pointed out, let's just panel some experts before the committee. Let's just panel some experts and actually look at who created the energy mess. We're creating clean, green jobs, and I cannot tell you how embarrassed you must be for the legacy that you left this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I wished that the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke was present in this debate, because he's quite a country singer and he'd be singing Here We Go Again. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if you wish, I'll ask him to come around to your room and he can sing it for you. He's actually quite good. We do rib him quite a bit, but he's actually quite good.

We have advocated to get rid of the OPA for quite a while. I listened to the comments from the member from Cambridge and I can understand why they're doing this. Bureaucracy for the last nine years: That's been the

biggest growth industry in Ontario. It's not under control and it does look after itself; it keeps growing. I fully agree with the member from Cambridge's comments on that.

My wife and I have a smart meter at our place. We get along with it because we're not there early in the morning and we get home late at night. But there are too many people, especially when wintertime comes along, older people, who need the heat on. I mean, they can't sit there in the cold, waiting for the smart meter cycle to go around.

They have been a failure in Perth-Wellington. We get complaints about them all the time. As they come on the system, we're going to get more complaints—and that's hitting our most vulnerable people. It's certainly not hurting people who get out of their house early in the morning and come home later at night.

I suggested a while ago that I believe there's an award for energy producer of the year in New York. I was going to submit our energy minister's name to it. I haven't gotten that done, but I'll look into it as we go along, because I'm sure the people of New York and Quebec really appreciate our failed energy policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to get these numbers right from the member from Cambridge, because it's something that will resonate when I'm talking to constituents at the door. An organization that was supposed to have 12 to 15 grew into 255; 87 of them are at a \$100,000 salary per year, with the CEO getting \$570,000. Okay, I just want to get that right.

1710

Anyways, when I'm talking to my constituents when I'm walking down the street, they'd like to clearly understand what this merging, consolidation and taking out the opportunity for public input into the whole process is. Most of them—I would say most of them, not all of them. There are some very bright and good individuals all over Ontario, but this is not what they're absorbing. You know what they're absorbing? They get this nice little envelope at the end of the month or they get it on an email, and they open up their electricity bill. When they see that bill, when they come into my office and I have to deal with my own staff—we're breaking down. These people are in tears and they're wondering, "What am I going to do at the end of the month? Am I going to be sacrificing a pair of running shoes for my kid who is starting school right now or am I going to be buying my full prescription? Am I going to be buying groceries, or will I have to once again open up the door to my apartment in my apartment building so I can absorb some heat in my room?" That's what they're telling me. That's what's really happening out there.

When we're making these decisions, again I'll go back to the notes that I had—and I agree with a lot of the discussions that were talked about in here: We have to get this right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Cambridge has two minutes.

Mr. Rob Leone: I would like to thank the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane, the Minister for Training, Colleges and Universities—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There's one more two-minute, sorry. We'll revise that. The clerks' table told me there's another two-minute response.

The member from Nepean-Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must say I really appreciate the presentation by my colleague from Cambridge. I think he has been doing a wonderful job since he came here to Queen's Park after, of course, succeeding Gerry Martiniuk, a long-time MPP here.

Now, I just want to simply say this: There have been so many new members who have spoken today, and I was just thinking how incredibly they've all done in the last year. Just before a year ago we were still into a campaign. Many of these people have just arrived here. I look at my colleagues in the third party, the government of course and our own official opposition, and the vast improvement that they've made over the year. They just really fit in. They've been doing a great job.

But I want to speak now to the issue at hand, and it is of course the Ontario Power Authority that our party has had serious reservations with—massive concerns. In fact, we wanted to scrap this public relations authority a long time ago. My colleague from Cambridge is simply suggesting that we follow through with that plan instead of amalgamating it with another electricity distributor—the OPA doesn't distribute anything or create anything; it just talks about spin lines—that we should just scrap it altogether.

We're talking about minimal savings when you're facing a \$30-billion deficit. These folks suggest they're going to save \$25 million. The government of Ontario, when it's run by the Ontario Liberal Party, never saves any money. So we don't believe in their numbers, and that's what my colleague from Cambridge is simply saying today. I want to congratulate him for being such a strong member and defending the good folks of Cambridge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Now the member from Cambridge has two minutes.

Mr. Rob Leone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the members for Perth-Wellington, Algoma-Manitoulin and Nepean-Carleton. I count that as five people, but thank you very much for so much enthusiasm for speaking on my speech here.

I listened intently to the remarks by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. One thing that strikes me is they've been in government for nine years—nine years. You'd think that they would actually accept that over nine years, things under their watch haven't improved very much. I haven't heard them apologize for tripling the size of our deficit. I haven't heard them apologize for doubling the size of our debt. This is nine years—nine years—and they refuse at every

given chance to take the blame for anything. It's remarkable. It's remarkable that they still are sitting here. The Minister of the Environment likes to heckle as much as he does, and I appreciate his commentary. But the reality is, nine years and they've failed to get their fiscal house in order. In fact, they've made it far worse—never an apology. Never an apology for, as the minister says, leaving the bill for future governments.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You had a \$5-billion deficit in 2003.

Mr. Rob Leone: You're talking about a \$5-billion deficit when you have a \$15-billion deficit, member from Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You said you had a balanced budget.

Mr. Rob Leone: Well, you have a \$15-billion deficit and you don't complain about that. I don't understand. My kids are going to be paying for your mistakes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always an honour, always a privilege to stand in this place. I think I'll pick up where my friend from Cambridge left off and perhaps really just challenge this government, using this bill to explain a few of the issues around the energy file.

First and foremost, there was a lot of crowing from the government side today about the coal plants being closed, but I've been here for a few years, not as many as some but more than many, and I remember this government promising to close all the coal plants by 2007. Here we are, almost 2013, and we're finally getting around to one. I also recall this government attempting to rationalize the energy sector from day one, truly, and yet for some reason we have the highest electricity bills in the country in the province of Ontario.

Again, my friend here from Algoma-Manitoulin actually spoke about the devastation that these high electricity bills have had on the working families, the ordinary people in Ontario. These are the people we hear from in our constituency offices. These are the seniors that didn't get much help with the home renovation tax credit but are getting hit extremely hard by this government's energy policies. There's no question about it. That's what's going on.

There are other problems too, of course, around the energy sector since this government has been in office. I heard mention of the smart meters, so-called smart meters. There's nothing much very smart about them, Mr. Speaker. In fact, for seniors, for small business people, these are simply another grab at their money, and trust me, for seniors and small business people this has been a very rough ride over the last nine years this government has been in office. This isn't helping, because they have no choice about when they are going to use energy in their businesses or in their homes. Seniors cannot be expected to do their laundry at 2 in the morning. Most seniors I know are in bed by 9. Small businesses can't open their businesses overnight if they are used to operating their businesses during the day. Again, this added tax isn't helping, and it's not saving money, in fact. It costs about \$1 billion to put those smart

meters into homes, and we're not seeing anything like that kind of return on them. Again, it's another policy that this government has brought in.

For the environmentalists out there who are concerned about where we get our energy from, our energy critic today got up and asked this government a question about nuclear energy. Fifty per cent of our energy comes from there, and this government is running wholesale into that. The problem is, you put so much money into the refurbishment of something like Darlington, you don't have money left over for other programs. Any environmentalist, from David Suzuki on through, will tell you that nuclear is not the way to go in terms of meeting our energy needs.

We often hear from them about, "How would you do it better?" We could point to an example, actually, just next door to us in a province called Manitoba, where they've actually put some money into conservation. This is the way they've done it; it's very smart: What they've done is that you can actually borrow money from the government to retrofit your house, and then you pay it back, and it's a self-revolving fund. Now, that makes sense, because I would love—I'm sure many of us would love to have solar panels on our roofs. My goodness, I'd love to have a wind turbine on my roof, but I don't have the money to do it. I don't have the money to do it, Mr. Speaker. In fact, most Ontarians I speak to don't have money to put \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000 into retrofitting their house to make it greener. They just don't have that money, so they don't do it, because it means money up front for possible savings in the future. It sounds a little bit like that home renovation act again. That doesn't work either.

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Here's the situation: Why not, like they do in other jurisdictions, give us the money and we pay back the money out of our savings on energy? That's smart. That's not this administration.

If you really want to zero in on the two areas this bill has a problem with, these are they: ministerial oversight, again funneling all this power into the minister's office—where have we seen this before? We just saw it in Bill 115; we're seeing it here yet again—and, conversely, withdrawing that oversight from the citizens of this province, from the community.

Talking about addictions to issues and to ways of doing this, this government seems to have an addiction to concentrating power in ministers' offices and withdrawing it from the transparent oversight of its citizens. We've seen them do this in a number of different files. Here, again, we see them.

This is not to say that we're not amenable to some rationalization of the energy sector. My goodness, it needs it. We have a bloated bureaucracy. We have people making too much money. Again, we're all in agreement on that. The question is the way they're doing it.

With that, I'll stop, because I'm really interested in the feedback.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Taras Natyshak): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I notice that the member finished a bit earlier than I anticipated, and I was wondering whether she had the answer to why the NDP government of the day cancelled the potential contract for Conawapa, which is the power coming in from Manitoba.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: A single name, Jim: Bob Rae, your leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: They all try to pretend they weren't around—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I wasn't; we weren't.

Hon. James J. Bradley: My friend Gilles Bisson was there, the member for Timmins—James Bay; my friend the member for Trinity—Spadina; the former leader of the party—they were all there. They weren't hiding at Honey Harbour or somewhere when they made certain decisions.

They decided they were going to cancel this very favourable contract for Ontario. That contract would have brought clean, cheap power in from Manitoba, I think for 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. I thought, "Well, this is a good idea." I was encouraging the government of the day, saying, "This sounds like a great idea. It's a nearby province, and you should probably take advantage of this contract." But the NDP government of the day decided—they always like to pretend now that it was a one-person government; it wasn't. The NDP government of the day said, "No, no. We don't want that. We want to cancel that particular project."

The other thing I always wondered was—they were so opposed to nuclear power that I thought that they would immediately be closing down the nuclear generating stations around the province of Ontario. But lo and behold, the Darlington project continued and none of the nukes were closed down.

Now, I can understand why that is. I'm not necessarily being critical but just trying to get that on the record and trying to get the response from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —a person who I think should be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister knows, when I say "Thank you" three times—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I thought you were thanking me for the comments—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, not for the comments. Three times: Wrap up the show. Thank you.

Member from Huron—Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand up today and speak to our member's comments regarding Bill 75.

It's an interesting day when the government is crippling our ability to compete for jobs in environment with the rest of the world with this farce of an energy approach. Combining the Ontario Energy Board with the OPA is just an absolute misstep. You know the OPA is nothing but a bloated layer of bureaucracy that Ontarians cannot afford.

I think the Liberals are finding out, loud and clear—how does that song go, you guys? "It's Not Easy Being Green." It's not easy being green, with failed policies and a failed vision, and that's exactly what this Green Energy Act is.

Then, to trump that, or put the icing on the cake with Bill 75, it just makes a person shake their head, because really and truly, not only have they crippled our ability in Ontario to attract jobs and investment, but as they cut—and I'm sure our NDP friends will agree that as energy costs continue to rise and they choose to cripple the most vulnerable, the people who cannot afford their energy bills during the winter, people who look to their municipal social services for assistance, and when they cut that in half, by 50%, they're crippling so much more than just our economy. They're taking away the ability for people to survive, and it's just not acceptable. This province has become unaffordable under the Liberal watch, and it's shameful.

We need a vision for energy that is affordable, reliable and is bought into by communities across this province. As I said before, Bill 75 does nothing to address the issues of the day, and we need to be rid of the OPA once and for all. That's the right step.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's, once again, an honour to be able to comment on the member from Parkdale—High Park, but I'd like to concentrate on a few comments that the Minister of the Environment made in rebuttal.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Conawapa.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, that was way before my time. And you know what? From my understanding, a contract was cancelled to buy energy from another province and bring it here. Perhaps the minister, in his further comments, could explain what's happening now, because we pay states and other provinces to take our power. So we've kind of turned the tables, but in a bad way, because it's one thing to turn down a contract to buy power but to actually pay other jurisdictions to take your power—actually, in the Toronto Star, it was that now the IESO is thinking about changing that. Because when you export power—actually, when you pay someone to take it, is that actually exporting? Exporting, usually you get money. It's not even giving it away. I don't know. But you can't charge the global adjustment fee.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No brownouts; no blackouts.

Mr. John Vanthof: No brownouts, no blackouts, but we pay other people to take our power. In ridings like mine, with big hydroelectric capacity, at times we force the turbines to turn backwards. We wear out our turbines

to burn electricity. We wear out our equipment to burn electricity.

So let's talk about the present and how this bill is actually hiding things like that, or trying to, and let's further the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, in response to the honourable member from Parkdale–High Park and also the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, when it comes to the NDP and energy, it's very surprising. They oppose almost everything. When it comes to nuclear, they oppose nuclear. But in the meantime, when they were in office, they let the nuclear projects go, and I thank them. I thank them for letting the Darlington project go on and to come online because Darlington nuclear power station is one of the best, more efficient nuclear power stations in the world. We are so proud that Canadian technology is working very well in the Darlington power station.

Today, Mr. Speaker, 80% of our electricity comes emission-free. That's what the NDP wants. But when it comes to green energy, the NDP votes against green energy. When it comes to bringing hydroelectricity from Manitoba, the NDP cancelled that project. It's very, very surprising.

On the conservation side, which the NDP seems to be for, again they opposed that bill. But I'll just give some numbers in relation to conservation and our energy policies in relation to conservation.

Since we came to office, we have conserved 1,700 megawatts of peak time. We have conserved 1,700 megawatts. This is an enormous amount of power we are conserving, and the plan is to conserve over 7,000 megawatts by the year 2030.

Now, they refer to smart meters; I don't have much time to talk about smart meters, which basically save us—to bring down the peak times. We have been saving enormously by introducing this modern technology. We have to go with technology. All countries are going with the technology in relation to energy—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Parkdale–High Park has two minutes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to all the members who spoke. First, to the member from Richmond Hill, no, we voted for the Green Energy Act. I really wish the government would check their facts before they stand, because that's a fact. And Timiskaming–Cochrane said it right: Absolutely, we are paying other people to take our power. How absurd is that? We'll leave it at that. Huron–Bruce: Absolutely, we are in favour of rationalizing the way we deliver. The \$100,000 salaries, over \$500,000 for the CEO—and that's cheap, by the way. Remember OPG? Whoa, millions there. Absolutely there's a better way of delivering energy.

But I want to spend the bulk of my time addressing my good friend the Minister of the Environment. I don't know why it is that Liberals stand up in this House over and over again attacking Bob Rae. I don't understand it.

Poor Bob. I'm going to start wearing a T-shirt saying, "Poor Bob."

I don't know what Bob Rae has done to offend the members opposite to the degree that they insist upon attacking him every chance they get. I don't understand it. Certainly out of our now 18 members in our caucus, only two actually ever worked with the guy. The other 16 are pretty happy that we managed to avoid it—but we have a reason. They should uphold their leader. No wonder he's doing so badly in the polls, when his own party continues to attack him. If your own party's attacking you, what hope do you have, Mr. Speaker?

I'll leave it at that. It's been a joy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I must say, I really enjoyed that speech by my colleague from Parkdale–High Park. It really does say an awful lot about the provincial Liberals that they're trying to distance themselves so far from their former provincial counterpart and current federal leader. I can understand that must be very difficult for them at a very difficult time like this is for their party, given that only Justin Trudeau will put his name forward at this point in time.

But here we are, Speaker. We're actually talking about Bill 75, and this, of course, is the Ontario Electricity System Operator Act. There's not much we can say here other than this apparently is more about shuffling bureaucrats down the hall than it is actually about increasing energy distribution, reducing energy distribution, talking about our hydro prices in this province, the transmission of energy or the distribution of energy. It has everything to do with the bureaucratic shuffle.

In fact, Speaker, you will recall—you were here in the previous Parliament—when there were bureaucrats being moved from the provincial government over to the federal government when we saw the HST. You'll recall this, Speaker. Remember, those bureaucrats, on a Friday, were provincial government employees. By the following Monday, they were federal government employees. But not to be outdone—not this government, oh my goodness—\$46,000 is what Mr. McGuinty and his buddies gave those bureaucrats for changing the nameplate on their office doors and their business cards from "provincial government" to "federal government."

These are the types of efficiencies we talk about when we talk about the Ontario Liberal Party. They have no real concern for how much anything costs, so long as they can have the bureaucracy to hide behind.

Now, members of my party have been talking for most of the debate about the fact that this is a shield to shield the government. It's a paranormal force to shield the government from any criticism. We know, for example, and we have said for quite some time that the OPA is more about public relations than anything to do with energy—distribution, transmission, anything. We know, for example, that they started off with about 12 to 14 employees as a transitional agency. We know over that period of time, since this government has been in office

over the past decade, it is now a 235-person organization. Over 87 of their employees are on the sunshine list, making over \$100,000. This is how big this agency has become. As the previous speaker noted, the CEO is now making over \$570,000. And I assure you—

Mr. John Yakabuski: And they don't produce a megawatt of electricity.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —in some ways this must be a very good thing, because at least that is the one person in Ontario who can afford his hydro bill. For once, there's only one silver lining, and that's why—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, there are some of those McGuinty consultants who are doing well too.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Exactly.

But I think it's really important for us to revisit what the OPA does. As my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has stated, they don't produce one ounce or iota of energy. They are there to shield the government. They have a CEO that gets paid \$570,000, 87 people are making over \$100,000, and we know that over the past decade this is an agency that's grown from 14 people to 235. Why? Because this government wants to protect itself. Well, that's why, in the Ontario PC caucus, we said, "Let's scrap that agency." It should be called the Ontario Public Relations Authority, the OPRA, not the OPA.

So we on this side think that this bill is in the wrong direction right now. We feel that this bill could have done something more. It could have said, "Okay, this is a redundant agency." As my colleague from Cambridge stated, the letters that he is receiving in committee are the exact same letters coming from the ministry. Almost word for word, these letters are exactly the same. It speaks to the relevance of this agency that is costing taxpayers money, that has nothing to do with the generation, the distribution or the transmission of energy. It has everything to do with public relations.

I would submit to you that after a decade in office we need less Liberal government spinners, not more. We think that this bill should be dealing with getting rid of that agency altogether and saving millions upon millions of dollars for the Ontario taxpayers, who, by the way, through their high taxes and through their hydro bills, are paying for these government agencies. We know, for example, that there are over 620 agencies, boards and commissions that our taxpayers in Ontario are paying for. We have said that this needs to be streamlined.

This legislation also addresses that the minister will go about submitting energy plans for the province's long-term energy needs. We all know that that, at the end of the day, is going to require cabinet approval anyway. So it speaks to the fact that they not only want to beef up the OPA but they want to create this Ontario Electricity System Operator, OESO, and they want to create that as a bigger buffer between them and the public. That is something that we're very concerned about. In the bill, it isn't very transparent. In fact, what it doesn't say is what those timelines would be for approvals. In fact, it's very

sparse on any of the details that one would actually require when debating this piece of legislation.

So we submit to this government that it's time for a change, not only time for a change in this bill but also time for a change in government, because we can't afford to allow this government to continue to grow and continue to spend more of Ontario's hard-earned tax dollars with government agencies that have become so bloated and irrelevant that they don't even do what they say they are going to do in their name. The Ontario Power Authority has nothing to do with power outside of public relations. The Ontario Electricity System Operator is going to have almost the same mandate. That's a problem. That's a problem, Speaker.

Then the minister says, "Well, this will save us \$25 million." We're facing a \$30-billion deficit. Don't you think they should eliminate the entire agency, start from the ground up, get this right for once? But that's not what is happening here.

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I misspoke, so I want to correct my record. I said that this OPA had this massive expansion from 14 employees to 235 over a decade. Speaker, it was seven years. That kind of growth is unprecedented in a government agency, but in this case, where the minister and the commissioner are sending the exact same letters to members of this assembly, you wonder, is there anyone left at the Minister of Energy's office, or is this just an extension of the Minister of Energy's office, a political extension?

We all know, for example, that everything is about politics with this government. How else can we explain the Mississauga power plant? How else can we explain that a Liberal campaign team made a decision to close that plant, not the government?

Mr. Rob Leone: They're calling the shots at the OPA.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think that, as my colleague from Cambridge just said, maybe the Liberal campaign is calling the shots at the OPA as well; it could be. It's a valid question, one worth pursuing, of course, in this assembly as we discuss this piece of legislation.

I want to reiterate, this \$25 million the government is suggesting they're going to save concerns us because, first, we don't believe their number, and second, if they think \$25 million is a big saving when you're facing a \$30-billion deficit, I've got news for them: It's not.

We know that there are going to be some very serious concerns with this new agency being created. It's going to be bigger—that doesn't always mean it's going to be better—and we know that the only result that will come from it is that it will be more of a buffer between this assembly and the people of this province with the government of Ontario. We can't afford that. This government agency that they're about to create is going to go the way the rest of them go: too big—too big and they fail. They fail the people of the province, and there's not enough transparency, there's not enough accountability. We actually really require in this province to get back on track and not support this legislation.

I look forward to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was rather interesting to listen to the member from Nepean–Carleton, especially when she started to share with us the amount of money that is involved in all of those agencies. We have to remember that not so long ago all of this was under the purview of one not-for-profit agency. It was a Conservative government that decided to privatize the whole lot, break it into little pieces; and then, under the Liberal government, we saw those bureaucracies grow and grow.

When she shares numbers like going from 14 employees to 270—some—I forgot the number exactly—going from a budget of \$14 million to a budget of \$76.4 million, that is phenomenal growth. What did the taxpayers of Ontario get for those investments? From where I'm sitting and from where the people of Nickel Belt are sitting, I don't think we got a fair deal out of this. A lot of people made really large salaries, but very little return for taxpayers' money in that investment.

My colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and I sit on public accounts. We asked for the auditor to go and have a look into, what will it really cost the taxpayers to have cancelled the gas-fired plant in Oakville? What does it really mean? What kind of dollars are on the table? This was blocked. This idea that the Auditor General—who knows his way around the books pretty well, Mr. Speaker—cannot be mandated to go and look blows my mind. We now see a bill that will take even more oversight out of an agency that we all agree is spending a lot of money. Things need to change.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? There's two of them up. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was intrigued, first of all, with your question this morning in the House, that you were defending those millionaire hockey players, but I know that you and I share a desire to see hockey on ice this year. I should not be saying this, but I wanted to compliment you on raising a significant issue today.

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes. I'm being nice to him.

I want to say as well that I am intrigued—I was very disappointed when in the initial discussions after the recent by-elections, the member for Nepean–Ottawa West-Nepean?

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member for Nepean, anyway, was not mentioned as one of the leadership candidates. I think it was an oversight for that to happen. I know the member for Oxford agrees with that. I just heard her—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): With all due respect to the minister, we've gone from hockey to now potential leaders running. I don't think you're quite sticking to the issue. Can we get back on track? Thank you. And that's not a track and field comment—back on track.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'll tie it in. I was trying to determine whether this was a leadership-type speech. I think there's some considerable support over there for a leadership speech of this kind. It was very good.

I did want to mention as well that sometimes the opposition makes suggestions or demands of government, and governments don't always agree with them. I've got to say that one thing they agreed with that the government did is when the Conservative Party and the NDP demanded that the power plant not be built in Mississauga. We listened very carefully and said, "The Conservatives and the NDP, we're listening to you." And—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you very much, Minister. Questions and comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to comment somewhat on the address by my colleague from Nepean–Carleton, and I will get to that, but I cannot leave the comments of the Minister of the Environment uncontested either—not that I'd be contesting Ms. MacLeod's comments, but he goes on and talks about a lot of different things, from leadership to other issues, by-elections etc. What that was was an attempt to skirt the issue that we're talking about in the House. In fact, this bill is all about skirting the issue, as we called, in the last campaign, for the abolishment of the OPA. This is their answer. They're going to move the shelves around a little bit and change the names on the doors. We'll have everything we had before under one roof. It will probably end up costing us more because that's the way Liberals save money.

But it's also to deflect away from the real issue that people are talking about in the province of Ontario. How long can we exist with the power prices that we have as a result of the failed Liberal energy policies? How long can seniors stay in their homes with the prices of electricity that they've got to pay and this 10% silly little rebate that they've thrown out there to try to placate them? It just won't do it. Energy prices are up over 150% since this government took power; 10% doesn't cut it. The HST takes care of 8% of that, anyway.

It's a little bit perturbing that they would bring in this bill when they don't talk about the real issue, the cost of power in Ontario, not just for the seniors but for the businesses that are trying to create the jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that just earlier today, you'd given me the opportunity to sit in that grand chair there. I have a different perspective and a different respect for the job, the important role that you play in this House to manage debate.

Energy, which is ultimately what we're talking about—power, whether it is from hydroelectric or nuclear or gasoline or the variety of different facets that we have created in this province—is important. The Minister of Energy was attempting to identify a leadership speech. I would submit that he hasn't heard one from his caucus for quite some time, so he wouldn't even

recognize a leadership role if it hit him in the face, actually.

What I would say is that this government has been operating in such an ad hoc way when it comes to the delivery of our system and the management of our system. It has no real, comprehensive long-term policy. They jumped on the renewable energy bandwagon, at the same time appeasing private interests, such as Enbridge, who are major players in the renewable energy field—major profit-makers as well. Instead of benefiting those residents in our ridings who could and who would make investments on their own to reduce their amount of energy consumption and to potentially produce some of their own, they have given full rein and open cheque-books, pretty much, to the large conglomerates that have jumped on to the FIT program without any real consideration to those who are truly affected in our ridings: the residents.

Speaker, I'm pleased to talk to this bill. I think it generally has the right concept but certainly lacks in content and is another minuscule way to address the issues in an ad hoc way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Nepean–Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I really appreciate the ability to thank my colleagues from Nickel Belt and Essex—thank you very much for engaging in debate—as well as my seatmate and colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who does know a thing or two about energy in this province, because of course he was the energy critic.

To my colleague the Minister of the Environment, it's always a pleasure to engage you in your delusional debates. Because at the end of the day, the only big issue, of course, in terms of leadership in this House is Mr. McGuinty's and the ongoing battle we see and the jockeying from his cabinet ministers trying to take his

job. But I do wish him best of luck September 28 to 30 as he fights his leadership review, which probably will not be very pleasant, because as we recall, Speaker, this government had an opportunity to win two majorities in this last calendar year, and on both occasions they failed miserably—just like they are with this bill.

It's unfortunate that Bill 75 doesn't really address the fiscal challenges we're facing in Ontario. It doesn't really face the energy crisis that we have. We're actually subsidizing power to end up selling it to Quebec at a subsidized rate as well. That's highway robbery to the constituents of Nepean–Carleton in the greater Ottawa and eastern Ontario region, of course, who are very angry about that.

We have said from the beginning, for years—since this agency was created, the OPA, seven years ago—that it is unaffordable, that it doesn't fulfill its mandate and that it should be scrapped. It's the only agency I know of that can start with 14 people and grow to 235 in seven short years, with 87 people making over \$100,000 and a CEO making \$570,000. Speaker, all this agency does—

Mr. John Yakabuski: And produce nothing.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It doesn't produce anything. In addition to that, it's nothing more than a government spin machine. We shouldn't be amalgamating it with anything. We should be scrapping it. That's why this party, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, will continue to stand up for Ontario taxpayers and continue to hold this McGuinty Liberal government to account and will continue to call for the OPA to be scrapped fully, completely, forever.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1753.

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First Session, 40th Parliament

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Thursday 13 September 2012

Jeudi 13 septembre 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave LevacPrésident
L'honorable Dave LevacClerk
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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 13 September 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 13 septembre 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WIRELESS SERVICES AGREEMENTS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LES CONVENTIONS DE SERVICES SANS FIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 6, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device / *Projet de loi 82, Loi visant à mieux protéger les consommateurs en ce qui concerne les conventions de consommation portant sur les services sans fil accessibles au moyen d'un téléphone cellulaire, d'un téléphone intelligent ou de tout autre appareil mobile semblable.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 82. First and foremost, I'm encouraged by the fact that we have a bill that, for the most part, is clearly in support of the consumer. It's a bill that puts consumers first, and as a member of the New Democratic Party, I'm happy to see something that puts people first.

There are some good points in the bill, which I'll discuss, and of course there are some points that I would like to see added—perhaps amendments—and we'll talk about those points as well. Then there's a bigger picture, a broader picture of where we should be headed with respect to cellphone usage and cellphone affordability as well as cellphones as an issue of accessibility, particularly given the rise of cellphone use as the primary avenue for Internet access.

We'll talk about what that means for young people and what that means for society when Internet is more and more one of the primary sources of information transmission as well as obtaining data or sharing information around the world; what that means for accessibility if cellphone prices and terms of wireless contracts are exorbitantly high and how that would negatively impact the ability of various members of society, particularly those of lower socio-economic background, to access something that more and more is becoming a necessity.

Before I begin my specific comments with respect to government Bill 82, it's important to note some interesting trends in terms of cellphone usage. Cellphones are more and more the primary telecommunication device that most individuals use. Many people do not have a land line and rely upon cellphones as their primary way to communicate with one another: to stay in touch with loved ones, to stay in touch with employers—essentially, the primary means to communicate with other people around the world.

As the use of cellphones increases and becomes the predominant means of communication, it becomes more and more important for us as a government to ensure that there is proper oversight of consumer rights, of affordability, of the contracts and the way in which these services are provided to consumers. As cellphone use increases, as it rises, it's more and more important that there are strict measures imposed on cellphone or wireless contract providers to protect the consumer. I think that's a logical connection.

I think it's important to note that the trend is particularly interesting amongst young people, students, those who are in employment which require travel and particularly, newer employees, people who are just entering the job force whose employment may shift from city to city or from different parts of the city. There is a definite connection with young people, students and the newly employed and the use of cellphones. The issues affecting affordability will affect young people or youth with a higher proportionality as opposed to elders or older members of society.

One of the interesting things that comes to light with this particular bill is the effectiveness of the complaints mechanism as a tool of democracy. We see that the CCTS, the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services, received an inordinate amount, a disproportionately high amount of complaints regarding cellphones; that the primary complaint that consumers had with regard to their telecommunication was cellphones. It goes hand in hand with the idea that cellphone usage is increasing, but it also is interesting that there were so many complaints about cellphones. If I can summarize: Essentially, the primary complaint was with the contracts—lack of disclosure of the contracts, lack of clarity with respect to the fees charged, lack of effective communication in terms of how to cancel one's contract.

I'll list some of these specific statistics. For 2010-11, the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services received 8,007 complaints, which constituted a 114% increase over the previous year. The per-

centage of Ontarians who use cellphones was noted at 77%, and the percentage of complaints received by the CCTS that were in respect of wireless companies or wireless contracts was 62%. Again, that's the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services. So, well over half of the complaints received by the commissioner were with respect to wireless-related issues.

The complaints broken down in 2010-11: 29.32% of the complaints were related to Bell; 16.92% related to Rogers; and 17.32% related to Telus. Complaints about cellphones and long-distance charges consistently appear on the Ministry of Consumer Services' annual top 10 consumer complaints.

It's also of note that cellular phone service is the business category for which the Better Business Bureau in Canada has processed the most complaints this year.

What's interesting to note here is that this was certainly a key issue among consumers, this was a major issue among consumers—and this is a demonstration of one additional tool that I strongly encourage citizens and residents of Ontario and Canada to make use of: The complaints process is a tool of democracy. Complain about things that you don't accept. Raise issues about things that aren't acceptable to you, and it is a way to have your voice heard by the government.

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It was something that I found interesting given the malaise or the apathy with respect to political engagement that is plaguing our society, that is plaguing our province. I want to just encourage people to, in any way possible, interact and engage with their community. Be politically active; it's important. This is another mechanism by which your concerns, that people have raised, have effectively resulted in the government listening. I'm encouraged by that, and I think it's important that we really look at the complaints process in any area as a tool or mechanism of democracy. I encourage people to use this tool broadly, though. It's not limited to this particular area, but it's a positive example of how we can use this idea or mechanism of complaint—the complaints process—to forward democratic principles.

One area, I think, in which we don't see enough action is with respect to police accountability. That's an area where I really encourage people to make use of the existing civilian complaints commission, but we need to expand that.

Looking at some of the positive points of this bill, the number one issue or one of the primary concerns that was raised by consumers was the nature of the contract. The contract that is signed that governs one's cellphone expenses or the contract or—the terms of one's cellphone bill are defined by a wireless agreement. These wireless agreements were often riddled with optional fees, hidden fees, hidden expenses that the layperson, that a person without a degree in law, wouldn't be able to decipher, and they were not written in clear language that was meant to be understood by the consumer. Because of that, it's no surprise that many people were left very confused about why their cellphone bills were so high, were left

very confused about how they could cancel their cellphone contract, and felt trapped in their cellphone bills. It is currently a very serious issue of affordability. Many people are faced with extremely high cellphone bills month to month, and it is certainly a serious affordability issue.

The requirement of Bill 82 to full disclosure is something that is much needed. It's concerning that it wasn't already there. Why it needed to be legislated raises some concerns and some questions, but it's very encouraging to see that there is now greater protection with respect to providing clear and full disclosure of the contract. This disclosure will include optional and mandatory services like the emergency fee that many people see on their cellphone bills—those are mandatory, and then certain optional fees.

Now, what is also very important, and I think is a clear message in favour of consumers, is that if the contract doesn't include full disclosure, if it does not satisfy all the requirements of full disclosure, then the consumer can cancel his or her contract without any cancellation fees. I think that's a strong message in support of the consumer, because if there are any concerns that come up that weren't disclosed in the wireless agreement, the consumer then has that right to cancel their contract. I think that's very encouraging. I'd like to see—my concern is that when someone chooses to engage in that and make use of that right, I want to see what happens with respect to whether there are collection agencies called in and whether or not the wireless supplier honours that.

I know that there are some strong penalties in this bill, but sometimes legislation, which is very well meaning, doesn't end up being implemented in a way that the consumer actually gets the benefit. So, I am encouraged by the legislation in that regard. I'm curious to see what will happen if an individual claims this was not disclosed in the wireless agreement and chooses to cancel their contract—what the supplier will do in that regard. I'm hopeful that they'll follow through on this legislation and they don't take the action of engaging the collection agencies.

Also, another key point that is encouraging in this bill is the protection with respect to contract termination fees. Many people feel very trapped. They find out that there's a much better contract available, a much better plan available with another provider, but they're trapped in their own plan, and if they were to cancel, it would cost the equivalent of a year or two years or even more of a plan with another company. They feel that it's simply impossible, or financially such a burden, such an obstacle to actually cancel their plan. So it's important to allow the consumer the opportunity to actually cancel their contract with reasonable termination fees.

At first blush, two areas come to mind that aren't addressed in this bill which are quite important and should have been addressed, and I'm hoping we can look at ways of addressing these in committee hearings. One is current contract holders, people who have a contract right now and what they can do, because the way the bill

is written, if you have an existing contract, it will not be subject to the protection in this bill. So if you already have a cellphone contract and it has a very strict form of cancellation or termination clause that would sometimes be quite exorbitant in terms of cost, you're not protected at this point. I think there's a way to address that, and I strongly encourage all members of this Legislative Assembly to look at ways of ensuring that this protection actually applies to people who currently have a contract so that they aren't stuck for two, three or four years.

The other area that many people complain about—I have constituents who complain about this—is when you travel overseas or even out of the city and you incur roaming fees. Roaming fees are one of the most vague and unclear areas in terms of cellphone usage. People are completely unaware that simply crossing an imaginary line results in the doubling, tripling or quadrupling of their actual fees, and there is no reminder. There is no update provided that you have incurred this many minutes of roaming or this many megabytes of data while roaming, and if you want to consume any further or use your phone any further, there is an option for you to purchase a roaming package. That type of awareness is not provided. Some cellphone companies do provide it, but by and large, people are left unsure, and they come back with very exorbitant bills, very expensive cellphone bills because they were unaware.

I think that if we want to talk about consumer services and protection of consumers with respect to cellphones, roaming charges is an area that should be addressed. It was left unaddressed in this bill, and I think that's something we need to look at. Hopefully, that's an area where we can hear from consumer groups, citizens and residents about how we can address that and some requirements we can place on wireless providers so that we can address that issue.

The list of requirements of a contract is pretty exhaustive, things that one would assume: name of consumer, name and contact info of supplier, date of agreement, terms of agreement, expiry date of the agreement, description that itemizes each service, a statement indicating whether any goods provided are subject to any technological or physical features that restrict their functioning.

So if you obtain a feature that doesn't actually work on your phone, you should be made aware of that. If there's a feature that you're paying for but you require an additional type of handset—you require a smart phone or any other type of particular hardware—you shouldn't be paying for a service that you can't actually use on your cellphone. I think that is quite sensible. It makes sense, and it's something I like that has been included. Terms and method of payment, total amount paid by the consumer—again, all important things that should be included.

The area that I think many people were quite confused by, and I think including this in the contract is very important, is the manner of calculating the amount the consumer is required to pay to the supplier if the consumer cancels the agreement. That's an area where many people

were left guessing. If I cancel my contract, how much is it going to cost me? I think that's a positive sign that we have that added in there.

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The positive side is that if any of these requirements aren't met, the cellphone provider has this sword of Damocles hanging over their head that the consumer can cancel the contract if they don't provide all those details. Again, that's a positive thing.

The other area many constituents have approached me on, and that I think ends up being a very sore spot for many consumers, is when you make a change on your plan. You decide to change something in your plan—you decide to add additional minutes or add voice mail—and all of a sudden you get a letter in the mail saying that you've now increased or agreed to renew your contract for another three years or another two years, and there is no agreement. There is no question about increasing or renewing the term of your contract, but simply by changing one feature, you've automatically been deemed to have renewed your contract. I think that's something that's been happening to many people. It's a scary thought when your clear agreement isn't required to renew a contract. I think that's absolutely unacceptable.

This bill does include some clear parameters around requiring a clear notification—not a tacit agreement but a clear agreement—that you have acknowledged that you're renewing your contract and that you make that agreement. I think it requires great attention, because without having a clear acceptance of renewing a contract, it's completely unfair, and it results in people being trapped in contracts unfairly.

Now there are some concerns in terms of the remedy, and I want to talk about this as an issue of affordability. If a consumer cancels a wireless agreement and the supplier demands payment, the bill indicates that the consumer can commence action in the Superior Court of Justice. If there's an issue that comes up and the supplier doesn't provide the adequate details that were required under the law or there wasn't full disclosure as required by the law, and the consumer decides to cancel their payment or cancel their contract, but then there's an action commenced by the supplier—basically the supplier says, "Hey, you didn't pay your fees. We're going to take you to collections for that," the consumer's allowed to commence a claim in court. You're basically allowed to go to court. The problem is, how many people have the time, the knowledge or the ability to actually go to court?

So, sure the remedy is there. Sure, if you're improperly treated by a cellphone provider you can take the issue to court. There is some strong language in terms of the offences and the fines that would be imposed on the corporation: \$250,000 is the maximum for a corporation, and \$50,000 is the maximum for an individual who is convicted under this offence for not following any of the agreements. The problem is that requiring court action will preclude a large number of people who can't take time off from work, are intimidated by the court system, feel that this would just incur further costs by taking it to

court and processing it in court—that it will cost them more money without any guarantee of getting a result.

Again, I'm skeptical about that portion of the bill and how well the average consumer will be able to actually employ that. How could a consumer take a matter to court when they've never gone to court, and they're intimidated by the entire process? Hiring a lawyer would be almost counterintuitive. If you're arguing over a couple hundred dollars, which is significant in terms of your monthly budget, but how are you then expected to obtain legal representation for such a paltry amount, in the scheme of what the lawyer's fees would be? I mean this amount may make the difference between affording your groceries or not, but in the context of paying a lawyer hundreds of dollars, it makes no sense to pay hundreds of dollars to a lawyer over \$100 or \$200 of a contract fee. So, again, I question that area in terms of the remedy, and I encourage perhaps a less legal or a less strict imposition in terms of how you can access a remedy. Going to a board that's outside of the legal system might be something that's easier and might be something that a consumer will actually make more use of.

In terms of the broader point of cellphones and cellphone usage as an accessibility issue, we need to understand exactly how many people this impacts in Canada. We know that globally, cellphones are certainly on the rise. In many areas in the world, you can't actually get a land line set up due to geographic and infrastructure issues, but you can certainly put up a cellphone tower and access satellites. So we know globally that cellphones are certainly bringing the world together.

In Canada right now, there's an indication that over 22.5 million Canadians subscribe to wireless services. Again, specifically in Ontario, 77% of Ontarians are actually using cellphones or subscribe to a cellphone service.

When we look at what this means for accessibility, there is research that was released this year, January 25, 2012. It was research conducted for Google by Ipsos. In this survey, there were six major companies used. Many people probably don't know that the number one way in which consumers today access the Internet is by their cellphone. In the US—they combined laptop use and desktop use, so basically any type of computer use—and found that 69% of those who access the Internet access the Internet through a laptop or computer, but 78% of people use a phone. In the UK, the numbers are even broader: 87% of people access the Internet by their mobile device and 74% by a computer. In France, the numbers are about the same: 74% use both a cellphone or a mobile device to access the Internet and a laptop. And in Japan, 96% of individuals who access the Internet use a phone or a mobile device and 86% use a laptop or desktop.

I was once in a class, and my professor was talking about the Internet and how he viewed the Internet should be used. He looked at it like a highway. When you're driving on a highway, you can be driving a very

reasonable car, and you can still travel 100 kilometres per hour and get to where you want to go. You can be driving in a sports car, you could be driving a luxury sedan, but you're still able to make use of those roads; you're still able to travel to where you want to go. Your make and model of car are not determinants of your ability to access the highways.

Similarly, if we want to live in a truly free society, we want to narrow the gap of inequality. We want to increase the equality of opportunity—which is important language, because opportunity exists, but there is a vast inequality of that opportunity. Depending on where you're from, your community, your background and your access to resources, your ability to access resources and your ability to access opportunity are completely disparate, depending on what your background is. If we really want to be serious about addressing inequality, addressing poverty reduction, addressing creating a society that's more fair and equal, we really need to look at how we can make opportunity more equal so that more people can access opportunity. If we accept—and I think we all should accept, that the Internet is an invaluable tool: It is the culmination of global information; it's a way of sharing and learning, communicating; it's a way of accessing information. And we refer to this age as the information age: Education is power, information is power. Then access to this power, access to this information, access to this wealth of data, access to the Internet has to be affordable, has to be equal and has to be something that is not dependent on your socio-economic background. If you are not well off, if you are not wealthy, that doesn't mean you don't have the same ability to access the Internet or access information, access data.

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In that light, if we look at the Ipsos research that cellphones are now becoming the primary way in which we actually access the Internet, how we actually get information, then it becomes more and more important that our cellphone and wireless contracts are affordable, and particularly that our data portion of that wireless contract is affordable.

When we look at the bill that's before this assembly, Bill 82, it provides some protection, for sure. It provides some much-needed clarity; that's sure. But what it doesn't provide is a requirement of affordability. I think that's something we really need to move towards, because providing clarity in the contract is one thing; providing disclosure is one thing; providing the consumer with more rights is one thing; but affordability is another thing altogether. If we want to be engaging in this notion of accessibility, of equal opportunity, and we realize that cellphones are now going to be the primary way that the majority of people in this society access the Internet, then we really need to get serious about making it affordable.

The bill does not touch on affordability. It doesn't touch on making data usage, voice usage and text usage more affordable. I think that's where we need to head, in terms of our climate right now, financially. We are still hard hit; families are hard hit. People are struggling to

make ends meet. People are struggling to pay their bills. In that context, it's very important that we actually make cellphone usage more affordable, that we make our bills more affordable, that we make what citizens are paying for more affordable.

Why I bring that up is, if we compare what we're paying here in Canada with the rest of the world, we would be astounded by the differences. Let me touch on some of those areas right now.

There was an initiative, New America Foundation's Open Technology Initiative, October 14, 2010. The initiative did some research and did some survey work. What they found—what we've already known very clearly—is that cellphones are intertwined with our lives, with the way we live and the world we live in; and that over the past five years, the problem is that North America is paying far more than anywhere else in the world and Canada stands amongst the highest, or the most expensive, for cellphone use.

On average in Canada—this is the on-average amount that Canadians pay—for a voice, text and data plan, Canadians pay on average \$67.50 per month—\$67.50. Remember that number. It's almost \$70 a month; \$70 a month in Canada is the average. Do you want to know what the average rate is in Hong Kong or in India? In Hong Kong, the average similar plan—data, text, voice—it's \$70 here in Canada. In Hong Kong, it's \$13.50 for the same plan, far less than half—almost 75% less than what we're paying.

In India, which we consider a developing nation—it doesn't have the same infrastructure; it doesn't have the same technology in terms of the saturation that we have here in Canada, in terms of the infrastructure that we have here in Canada—they're paying \$12.90 per month.

I just need to stress that again. We're paying \$67.50 per month for the similar plan that in Hong Kong and India they're paying close to \$13 per month for. That's outrageous.

Why is it that we're paying so much more? We consider ourselves an industrialized, developed nation. Why are our fees so high? It has a lot to do with competition. It has a lot to do with the number of competitors in the industry. I'm sure my colleagues from the Conservative Party would like to hear this: There is far more competition in other countries, there are far more providers in other countries, and there's a more open market when it comes to provision of wireless services.

Even the States, just across the border, has a more competitive market and much more affordable rates and fees. The majority of companies in the US don't have roaming across any of the states. You can purchase your plan in one state and use it in any other state and there are no roaming fees whatsoever; that's a very common occurrence. Whereas in Ontario and in Canada, it's a completely different picture.

For basic voice, text and data plans, the cost is around—and this is just a step up from the average. If you look into a little bit better plan—voice, text and data—the cost is around \$75 with only four megabytes of

data. That's just unacceptable. I mean, four megabytes of data is a paltry amount; it's an insignificant amount. With current data usage, you can't get much with that.

If we compare just some other countries, besides—we're looking at density. I think someone from the Conservative Party was talking about maybe the issue is density, that Canada's population is less dense. We have less population compared to other countries. If you look at population size, Denmark and Finland are countries of smaller population than Canada.

In Canada, if we look at a post-paid plan just for voice and text, it's \$38. This is according to the research conducted by the Open Technology Initiative, which was done on October 14, 2010. I'm referring to a chart where they looked at and compared countries like Canada, Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, India, Japan, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, the US and the UK. They found that in Canada, it's \$38.70 for a 250-minute plan. The post-paid plan charge was about 31 cents per minute. In Denmark, they were paying \$17 for 240 minutes, and it works out to about seven cents a minute. So we're paying 31 cents a minute; they're paying seven cents a minute in Denmark. In Finland, again, they're paying about seven cents a minute, where we're paying 31 cents a minute. So we really need to look at what we can do to address this issue of affordability because, as it stands, we are far too expensive. It is far too expensive to pay for a cellphone here in Canada.

Just to explain how the study worked: In the study, they researched cellphone, text and data services for pre-paid, regular post-paid and unlimited post-paid plans. They looked at the various plans you can get where you receive a bill in the mail every month, or the plans where you pay as you go, and they compared various plans by various carriers in 11 countries. To allow a more direct comparison, the study basically broke down the price in US dollars per minute and per text and per megabyte.

I've just compared some of the per-minute voice costs. If you look at Canada versus other countries around the world—even our neighbours to the south—we're paying 31 cents a minute; they're paying 18 cents a minute. In the UK, it's 17 cents a minute. If we look at other countries, though, outside of the developed nations—if you look at India, Hong Kong, they're paying one cent a minute. In Sweden, it's actually four cents a minute; Taiwan, 12 cents a minute.

There is a serious issue of affordability, and it's very troubling that we are paying so much. It's one of those things that's not going to greatly impact the wealthy, it's not going to greatly impact those who are very well off, but it is going to make a big difference, a serious difference, in the lives of those who are already hard hit—who are already struggling to afford their monthly rent, their monthly hydro bill, people who are struggling to pay their student debt down. For those individuals, it will make a significant difference.

If we look at texting, texting is a technology that—it's important to note that there isn't a significant difference between sending a text locally or internationally. In terms

of the usage of data or the usage of the wireless network, it doesn't actually make a big difference for the provider where the text is being sent. But what we're charged if we ever send a text internationally is just an outrageous amount, given how much it actually costs the provider. If we compare that to other countries, we find that Canadians and Ontarians are being charged significantly higher than other countries around the world.

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If we do a comparison of post-paid plans—your regular plan where you get your bill in the mail on a monthly basis—and we look at what we're paying in terms of texts: If we compare Canada, for about 250 texts a month, it's about \$5—\$4.80. If we compare that to other countries—for example, Sweden: They pay \$17.80 for 5,500 texts. So compare 250 to 5,500, and it works out that it's essentially—they deem it almost unlimited. It's an unlimited texting plan. For what we're paying here, we're paying far, far more.

The area where we're seeing the biggest problem or the most marked difference is when it comes to our data. Data is, again, the most important area if you look at access to the Internet as being an essential or an important tool. In Canada, we're paying for our monthly plans, for 500 megabytes, which is a reasonable amount of data that you can actually access and make some good use of: We pay \$24 a month on average for 500 megabytes. If we compare that to other countries around the world, Finland is paying \$8.90. Denmark is paying close to half, about \$17 for 500 megabytes. If you look at India, it's completely different; they're paying \$2.10 for 5,120 megabytes. If we look at the UK and the US, they're paying \$15 for 200 megabytes and \$7.70 for 120 megabytes. So again, we're being charged significantly more for our data, significantly more for our voice and significantly more for our text messages.

In Canada and the US, consumers have the highest minimum monthly charge for a complete post-paid cellphone. Other countries that follow similar cost structures are significantly lower, like the UK, Denmark and Finland. On a broader picture, on a broader level of affordability, there is much work that needs to be done. In Ontario, we need to really address this issue if we want to be serious about addressing inequality and equality of opportunity.

Some areas that I think we need to look at, and I want members of this Legislative Assembly to turn their minds to, when it comes to committee hearings and when it comes to looking at ways to improve this bill: One area which many people I'm sure themselves have been affected by, and I have been affected by this, is over-usage. Overusage fees: If you have a set amount of minutes that you've signed up for, be they 300, 200 whatever amount, you have a set amount of minutes that you signed up for—say it's \$30 a month for 300 minutes. If you go over those 300 minutes—let's say you double that or triple that—if you were bumped into the next plan up and the next plan up was \$60 for 600 minutes, you'd be fine. But what happens is that cellphone companies

don't, first of all, let you know that you're over your limit, that you've gone over. They don't bump you or roll you into a higher usage. You end up paying hundreds of dollars because you've gone over your minutes, where you could have just paid \$60 if you had been bumped up to the next category.

Companies want to make a profit and they want to make money—I understand that—but there has to be some fairness. The best would be if they automatically rolled people into higher minutes. That would be the best. That would be a great step forward in terms of affordability. People would be automatically rolled into a higher category and not have to worry about their overage.

But in the alternative, at the minimum, all cellphone providers, all suppliers, should be required to make it very, very clear when you're nearing your limit, when you're at your limit and when you're over your limit. That should be a minimal requirement. That would be a simple tool—cellphone companies are able to do that, providers are able to do that—and it would be a very serious step forward in terms of making the consumer better protected and insulating them from some serious overuse charges that they could incur.

This has been the subject of a number of complaints. In fact, the CCTS, the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services, found people complaining that their data usage was over, and it was over on a regular basis. There's an example of someone being charged \$3,000 for data usage—\$3,000 for data usage—when all they required was some notification that “Hey, you're going over your limit,” and that person could curtail their usage, that person could choose a higher plan. Many options were available, but instead they racked up the fees, and it turned out that they had been going over by 70% each month, and it could have been dealt with by either bumping them up to a higher plan or curtailing their usage.

Again, if we want to take affordability seriously, then this is an additional area that we need to look at, and that's having the consumer be notified when they're going over their usage.

This overage applies for voice, it applies for data—and I stress data again, because if we're looking at the accessibility issue and that piece of accessing the Internet, that's where we need the most protection. That's where you can easily go over without realizing it. Depending on the website, depending on the content, it's very easy to go over in terms of the usage there.

What we're looking at now in terms of other areas of affordability when it comes to cellphone usage is the connection cellphone companies use between a handset and a contract. What happens is the handset itself is worth far less than the actual termination fee. A provider will have you sign up to a contract and get a free phone—and many people, again due to affordability issues, need that free phone, so they make use of that plan, which is fine. But what happens is, if they ever need to cancel their phone or they need to cancel their contract—the cost of the phone would make sense if that

was a part of the cancellation fee, but they're charged far more than that. They're charged far, far more than the actual cost of the phone that they purchased, just to cancel their contract. That's an area we really need to look at as well: tying in the use of promotional deals which require one to sign a contract to obtain a phone, and how we can make that more fair, more transparent and ensure that when you cancel your contract, you're not being charged more than the price of the phone in total.

The other area that I touched on briefly was how we are going to deal with those who are currently in contracts and the fact that this bill doesn't address that. I think it's very clear that for existing contracts, the cellphone provider should be required to implement this bill in perhaps a modified fashion. Of course, for a new contract, it's a very easy mechanism. You have a new contract; you have to fulfil the requirements of this bill, you have to fulfil the requirements of disclosure or your contract can be cancelled.

For existing contracts, people who are trapped in those need to make sure that there's a way, a modified approach of this bill, to allow them to have some protection as well, whether that is requiring information to be sent out to current contract holders expressing what their contract is in totality and clarity, and requiring that that clarification be sent out with a monthly statement within a certain time period—I mean, that's one mechanism; that's one way so that we can at least give current contract holders some protection. I would say that in committee we should look at amending the bill so that we actually give the same cancellation rights to these current contracts as well. They should also be entitled to the same ability to exit their contract or terminate their contract with the same protection provided for new contracts.

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I started off talking about the big picture in terms of accessibility, affordability, access to the Internet, and in a smaller portion as well, democracy. They all tie together. The complaints process that initiated this was something that came from the people. People complained about an issue. They complained about the high cost of cellphones. They complained about the disclosure of their details in their contract. They complained. They complained, and their voices were heard.

On a bigger picture, we're looking at using technology, using the Internet as a way of engaging our voters and engaging our society. As we move forward, there has been discussion of using cellphones for feedback in terms of research and surveys. There's been discussion of using or moving towards online voting, and we've seen online voting work at least at some level. At an internal party level, we've seen that there's a use of online voting. If we want to make democracy more accessible, if we want to move with the times, we need to change our model. In changing our model, the cellphone may be the tool that allows us to engage more members of society quickly, in a more efficient manner, and may encourage participation.

On a broader picture, this tool may be the tool that gives us more participation when it comes to politics and more participation when it comes to community engagement, and may reverse the trend of growing apathy. As voter turnout goes down, as less people are inclined to go to the ballot box, perhaps we need to look at different ways of engaging people, and politically as well as in a society sense, perhaps we can use this tool. If we can use the cellphone as a method of communication and as a way of transferring knowledge and transferring information—and we've seen the signs that people are trending toward using cellphones more as their means of communication and Internet access—then we are coming to a point where this becomes more and more a necessity of life. It becomes more and more a requirement of a modern society.

We are also faced with, perhaps, the potential fear that certain people will be left behind. If certain people are left behind and we want to have a more democratic and free society, then we are not fulfilling our duty here as legislators.

So the bigger picture is, in terms of where we move as a society, we need to look at different ways of engaging our community in terms of political awareness, in terms of civic duties and in terms of community engagement. As the means or the method of disseminating information moves more towards the Internet and more towards social media, then this will become a powerful tool.

We've seen this tool used in terms of the Arab Spring. We've seen people using technology as a vehicle for democracy, as a vehicle for freedom and as a way of inspiring change in the world. While there are some criticisms of technology and its sometimes negative impact on the social fabric of society—that people are not engaging one another, that there's certain etiquette that we're losing as we talk to one another and you see groups of people who are on their cellphones—there's still the positive side where it can be used for progressive politics. It can be being used for positive ideas spreading in a society, and it can be used as a tool towards greater democracy and freedom.

I encourage any tool that promotes those values. If we can use our technology more effectively in a way to spread a message of freedom, if we can spread a message of participation and we can spread a message of equal opportunity and equal access, then we should do everything we can to make this tool more accessible to all people because, on a broader level, that's a way of making our society more fair.

As my professor talked about the Internet being a highway and that you shouldn't be precluded from being able to access this highway based on the type of car you drive, the make and model of that car, whether or not it's a luxury sedan or whether it's a simple or modest vehicle—everyone should have the ability to get on the highway and drive for transportation—similarly, we want everyone to have the ability to tap into the social media that is becoming more and more prevalent in our society. We want everyone to be able to tap into the information

and data that's available online. If we do so, we will do a great deed in terms of making this world more fair, in terms of narrowing the gap of inequality, in terms of making opportunity more equal.

So I look forward to taking this bill into committee and addressing some much needed amendments.

I applaud the government. I think it's important to applaud where there are some positive things done. It's important to put partisanship aside and say it was a good step, and I think it's important, as parliamentarians, that we acknowledge each other when there's a positive idea. This was much needed. Constituents have complained about it, and there are certainly some key points that have been addressed.

As always—and I think that the government should take this seriously but again take it in a good light—there's always more that can be done. I urge the government side to heed the advice of the opposition members, all party members, and not be blinded by partisanship. If there's a good idea that comes to the floor, whether it comes from the New Democratic Party or my colleagues from the Conservatives, who are unlikely to have that many good ideas—just kidding, to see if you're listening—I encourage you to take any idea that's positive. Don't worry about the credit.

Let's just work on making protection for consumers and take it seriously, because consumers need that protection. There are so many laws and so many issues that are in favour of the supplier, producer, retailer. We really need to make sure that we take care of the consumer, and let's take any ideas that are effective in doing that and implement those to make sure that, at least in this one area, we make life more affordable, we make the consumer more aware of his or her rights, and that the contracts and the agreements that people get into are more transparent. I think that we'd be doing a good job for the people of Ontario, and we'd be doing our job that we were sent here to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It's a pleasure to rise in debate on Bill 82. Mr. Speaker, this bill is all about protecting consumers in cellphone and wireless service agreements.

As we all know, cellphone contracts are a huge issue for many Ontarians. This is a pocketbook issue. Our government's bill contains measures that will reduce costs, cap cancellation fees, prevent automatic renewal of the contracts, and will make contracts more fair and transparent. And at any time, if any individual wants to cancel their contract, he or she can cancel with a modest cancellation fee.

Mr. Speaker, consumer protection is a matter for the provinces. That's why our government has brought this bill forward, and that is why there is a lot of independent support for this bill. Much of the problem in the wireless industry falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government and CRTC rules. I encourage the members from opposite benches to call on the federal government to take strong action. All this bill is about is empowering

consumers to make informed choices, to make informed decisions, when they are spending their hard-earned dollars.

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The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, in his presentation, spoke about regulations. When we brought in the HST, that HST implementation eliminated a significant number of regulations—which the member's party and leader have voted against.

I'm also looking forward to sitting down at committee for further debate on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I endured the hour from the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton. I don't say that to be critical; I just think it was long. An hour on this bill is an endurance test, actually.

In fairness, we would say that the consumer needs to be protected, and I think the remarks he made with respect to comparisons with India, Hong Kong, other countries: Canada is way out of line, technically. I agree. I like the nuance to the bill. I will be speaking. I wish I had an hour too. I wonder if I could seek unanimous consent for an hour here now.

The point being, though, I really feel badly for David Orazietti, the member from Sault Ste. Marie. I think he was really on the right track here. I would have jumped on board entirely because he was right down at the private members' level. I think the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton is on the same page. Let's put the consumer first and in front of this issue.

More importantly, Ontario—this is going to come under the CRTC, as you know; you're a lawyer—and as such, we don't need a whole meandering of regulations and exemptions. Section 10 is worth reading, as you know. It's the whole disclosure part.

We need to get a consistent and uniform system across Canada. The biggest thing that troubles most people, the viewers here today, is that if you're out of the province or out of the country, you'd better check out a roaming plan. My biggest surprise was a couple of years ago, when I was receiving calls, making calls and downloading stuff when I was out of the country; I was in Europe. When I got the roaming charge, I was floored. I just couldn't believe it.

There's stuff in here, protecting services, whether it's voice or data, that we need to make sure we're on the right page and be consistent with other provinces on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to commend my colleague here from Bramalea-Gore-Malton for a great disclosure of how he sees this bill this morning.

I agree with him: We need to give credit where credit is due—to the member who proposed this bill, along with the member from Sault Ste. Marie, who has got a similar bill that's looking at consumer protection as well. Give kudos where kudos are deserved. Let's work towards bringing greater protection for consumers. Let's look at

having that information available where there are clear parameters and clear understanding of what the disclosure is, knowing exactly what I'm purchasing.

When you buy a pair of running shoes, you know what you're getting. When you're buying a cellphone, it's not that easy anymore, where you have the hidden fees. I have a couple of boys who, with the jobs that they have, decided to purchase their phone. The contract went in the garbage, and it was only a couple of months later that they found out how expensive it was. That's one of the mistakes that a father learns from, but you've got to let those boys make those mistakes.

My friend alluded to something else where we—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I know; I just love bringing up my boys.

Another thing that my friend alluded to is that we're looking to maybe use this as an opportunity to bring a more inclusive province, to get more involvement from individuals. That raises a big red flag with me. The reason why it raises a big red flag with me is because we do not have the services in northern Ontario that are available here in southern Ontario. I myself as an MPP am challenged extremely hard with having regular communication with my constituents throughout my riding and my office.

I like the intent of the bill. It's really good, and it's going to be really nice to discuss this at committee. We need to keep that, in fact, not all of us have the same service across this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: The remarks that were just delivered by the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton on Bill 82 I thought were very, very relevant, and I thought his detail was much appreciated. I thought, generally, it was a very positive speech.

I think all of us are certainly concerned about consumer protection in the wireless field. This is something that, 10 years ago, wasn't a particular problem, but you've seen a real change. People who at one time were solely dependent on land lines for communication—we're witnessing a significant move from a traditional land line to wireless technology throughout our lives.

I could just share something. We had a short family holiday in Saint John, New Brunswick, and my daughter, who is 13, of course wanted to communicate with her friends back in Peterborough, so she had her BlackBerry, plus her iPad. She was able to use the BlackBerry to call her friend back in Peterborough, and was able to use her iPad to call up her friend on the screen and engaged in a fairly detailed conversation about the family trip and tour that we were experiencing in Saint John, New Brunswick, back with her friends in Peterborough. So that was a very interesting thing to watch, and of course, as has been mentioned by my friend from Durham, we got back to Peterborough to see the roaming charges for her to have that great conversation with some of her friends back in Peterborough.

I think this bill, which will ultimately go to committee, is an opportunity for all of us in this House to join together to really come up with an outstanding consumer protection bill in this particular area. We're witnessing great corporate concentration in the market, and there needs to be a balance with consumer protection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton, you have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga-Brampton South, the member from Durham, my own colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin and the member for Peterborough for their remarks and for their responses.

One area that I didn't touch on in my speech and that I wanted to touch on a little bit more, in terms of a potential way of dealing with the high costs, which I mentioned before, is that there are limited—this may be a bit odd coming from the NDP side, but there are a limited number of competitors in the cellphone market here in Ontario or here in Canada. Sometimes there's an illusion of greater competition, but if you look at Rogers, Rogers owns Fido and chatr. Koodo, which looks like another cellphone company, is actually owned by Telus, and Bell owns Solo. So again, we don't really have a great deal of competition. Two new companies that made it into the market were Public Mobile and Wind, which did actually help in creating some unlimited plans, which I think definitely had a positive impact on the rates of other companies. But that may be an area where we need to look at opening up the market to allow smaller companies to come in and compete.

I would encourage those smaller companies to be Canadian companies so that we can keep industry and innovation here in Ontario, here in Canada. But I'm sure that we can come up with different strategies to allow for an opening of that market and a way to ensure that we create jobs here in Ontario, that those businesses that are encouraged to develop or to be established here have a job tax credit so that if they create jobs in Ontario, if they create infrastructure here in Ontario, if they train people in Ontario, they get tax credits based on that. But I think we can look towards creating more competition to bring down those rates, and one of those ways might be encouraging local industry or local, Canadian-based, new companies. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1009 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It gives me great pleasure to introduce my niece from Winnipeg, Tania Webster. Welcome.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Today, in the west members' gallery, I have with me constituents of mine from Nepean—

Carleton. They're the family of Eric Leighton. I have with us Sheri and Patrick and their daughter, Kaitlyn Leighton. I want to thank them for coming to Queen's Park today and for being so courageous over the past year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Today, visiting us from the riding of Niagara Falls, we have with us in the members' gallery Jacquie and Sam Seaver, parents of page Ethan Seaver, and their friend Judy Murray. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We also have in the Speaker's gallery today a delegation from the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers of India, a multi-legislative body made up of federal and state parliamentarians from the Republic of India. They are accompanied today by the Consul General of India. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests today.

Applause.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On Monday, August 27, 2012, the member from Cambridge, Mr. Leone, rose on a question of privilege concerning the government's failure to produce certain documents requested by the Standing Committee on Estimates.

The government House leader, Mr. Milloy; the member from Timmins-James Bay, Mr. Bisson; the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, Mr. Nicholls; the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Mr. Yakabuski; the member from Nipissing, Mr. Fedeli; the member from Leeds-Grenville, Mr. Clark; and the member from Beaches-East York, Mr. Prue, also spoke to this matter.

Having reviewed the notice provided by the member from Cambridge, the subsequent written submissions of the government House leader and of the member from Cambridge, the August 27 report of the Standing Committee on Estimates, relevant Hansards for the committee and various parliamentary authorities, I am now prepared to rule on that matter.

The details of what occurred in the committee are contained in the above-mentioned documents, but the essential chronology is as follows:

On May 16, the Standing Committee on Estimates formally adopted a motion requesting that the Minister of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and the Ontario Power Authority provide, within two weeks, all correspondence relating to decisions in 2010 and 2011 not to proceed with the construction of the power plants in Oakville and Mississauga, respectively.

On May 30, the minister responded to the request by indicating that it would not be appropriate to disclose the correspondence because the files were confidential and because many of them were either subject to solicitor-client or litigation privilege or else highly commercially sensitive; their disclosure would tend to prejudice ongoing negotiations and litigation. The Ontario Power Authority responded in a similar vein on the same day.

On June 5, in the Standing Committee on Estimates, a motion was brought forward by Mr. Leone calling for a report from the committee to the House with respect to the minister's May 30 decision not to provide the requested documents. The committee debated the motion and amendments to it on that day and three subsequent meetings of the committee—June 6, June 12 and July 11—finally adopting the version of the motion contained in the committee's August 27 report to the House.

On July 11, an agreement having been just reached to relocate the Mississauga plant, the minister provided some of the requested documents. The minister indicated that other documents would not be provided to the committee because they were subject to various legal privileges.

On August 27, shortly before the member for Cambridge rose on his question of privilege, the Standing Committee on Estimates reported that, for reasons indicated in the report, the government had not produced certain correspondence that the committee had ordered to be produced, and that this non-production may raise a matter of privilege. The report also recommended that the Minister of Energy be compelled to provide the documents requested by the committee without delay and that the minister be held in contempt if he refuses to do so.

Given these developments, the nature of parliamentary powers respecting the production of documents requires some examination. With respect to committee powers, standing order 110(b) provides as follows: "Except when the House otherwise orders, each committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and things." This standing order effectively empowers committees, including the Standing Committee on Estimates, to order the production of documents.

Further to this point, in a March 9, 2011, ruling dealing with a non-production incident in the Canadian House of Commons, Speaker Milliken found that there was a prima facie question of privilege where there was non-compliance with a production order made by a committee; the committee's report on non-compliance was not concurred in before a question of privilege was raised in the House.

Between the time of the raising of that question of privilege and the time that the Speaker ruled that there was a prima facie question of privilege, the House made an order for production with respect to the same documents; nevertheless, the ruling clearly indicates that it was based on non-compliance with the production order of the committee, not of the House.

Therefore, non-compliance with a production order made by either a committee or a House can, in a proper case, constitute a matter of privilege.

Turning to the issue of whether the matter before me is such a case, members will know that as a matter of parliamentary privilege the House has the right to institute inquiries, to require the attendance of witnesses and to order the production of documents. The House exercises this right when it gives mandates to committees and delegates powers to them; the committees in turn carry out

the mandates and exercise the powers within the limits of their authority. Therefore, when the Standing Committee on Estimates considers the estimates, it does so pursuant to standing orders 59 and 60, and the order of the House referring the estimates to that committee; when it orders production of documents relevant to its mandate, it does so pursuant to standing order 110(b).

The right to order production of documents is fundamental to and necessary for the proper functioning of the assembly. If the House and its committees do not enjoy this right, then the accountability, scrutiny and financial functions of Parliament—which go to the core of our system of responsible government—would be compromised.

At meetings of the Standing Committee on Estimates, the Minister of Energy did not assert that the committee had no right to inquire into the matter before it or that it had no power to send for the documents in question. Rather, the minister indicated that legal and other considerations should militate against the production of all requested documents.

But as Speaker Milliken indicated in the following excerpt from the Afghanistan ruling, page 2,043 of Hansard for April 27, 2010, parliamentary privilege—of which the right to order production of documents is but one category—trumps such considerations:

“Procedural authorities are categorical in repeatedly asserting the powers of the House in ordering the production of documents. No exceptions are made for any category of government documents, even those related to national security.”

Furthermore, pages 978 and 979 of the second edition of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice provides as follows:

“The standing orders do not delimit the power to order the production of papers and records. The result is a broad, absolute power that on the surface appears to be without restriction. There is no limit on the types of papers likely to be requested; the only prerequisite is that the papers exist in hard copy or electronic format—and that they are located in Canada. They can be papers originating from or in the possession of governments, or papers the authors or owners of which are from the private sector or civil society (individuals, associations, organizations, etc.).

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“In practice, standing committees may encounter situations where the authors of or officials responsible for papers refuse to provide them or are willing to provide them only after certain parts have been removed. Public servants and ministers may sometimes invoke their obligations under certain legislation to justify their position. Companies may be reluctant to release papers which could jeopardize their industrial security or infringe upon their legal obligations, particularly with regard to the protection of personal information. Others have cited solicitor-client privilege in refusing to allow access to legal papers or notices.

“These types of situations have absolutely no bearing on the power of committees to order the production of

papers and records. No statute or practice diminishes the fullness of that power rooted in House privileges unless there is an explicit legal provision to that effect, or unless the House adopts a specific resolution limiting the power. The House has never set a limit on its power to order the production of papers and records. However, it may not be appropriate to insist on the production of papers and records in all cases.”

In many parliamentary jurisdictions, the House and its committees often accommodate or respect security, legal and public policy considerations; they often accept reasonable excuses for non-production. However, these authorities also indicate that a decision to be selective with respect to production is a decision for the House or the committee.

In the case at hand, the Standing Committee on Estimates made a production order despite the arguments made by the minister. My response to the government House leader's claim that the committee did not turn its mind to the reasons for non-production proffered by the minister is,

—First, it was not obliged to do so.

—Second, the documents could have been offered to the committee under conditions that would both satisfy the needs of the committee and the minister: for instance, being received in a closed session without public disclosure, or in an acceptably redacted version. The Chair put forward this notion on one occasion, and it was passed by without comment by any member.

—Third, the government House leader in his written submission repeatedly points to what a difference a clear motion would have made to the Minister of Energy's ability to fully respond to the committee's request; that is, a motion that explicitly expressed the committee's request even for documents that are highly commercially sensitive, for which solicitor-client privilege is claimed and/or are subject to litigation privilege. It is claimed that the minister could have and would have complied in that scenario. During the time in question, the minister could have requested the committee to pass just such a motion, making it explicit that it still demanded the requested documents, notwithstanding the minister's wish to withhold disclosure for reasons stated in his May 30 reply to the committee's original request. The record does not show that the minister proactively did so.

The Standing Committee on Estimates was unquestionably entitled to request the documents sought from the Minister of Energy, and in the end the minister had an obligation to comply with the committee's call for those documents. The committee did not accept the minister's reasons for withholding the document and persisted in its demand during an extended period of time.

I am therefore satisfied that a *prima facie* case of privilege has been established.

However, in the face of all of the submissions, the committee transcripts and its report to the House, it seems possible to me that, but for the lack of frank communication, this matter might have been settled in the estimates committee some time ago. Further, given that

in his submission the government House leader wrote, "If the House chooses to issue the requested order or the committee chooses to pass a motion that clarifies its position with respect to the motion of May 16, the government will abide by the will of the Legislature," I am hopeful that there is a possibility that the matter still can be settled.

I want to quote two passages from Speaker Milliken's April 27, 2010, Afghan detainee ruling: "(I)t seems to me, that the issue before us is this: Is it possible to put into place a mechanism by which these documents could be made available to the House without compromising the security and confidentiality of the information they contain? In other words, is it possible for the two sides, working together in the best interest of the Canadians they serve, to devise a means where both their concerns are met? Surely that is not too much to hope for...."

"The fact remains that the House and the government have, essentially, an unbroken record of some 140 years of collaboration and accommodation in cases of this kind. It seems to me that it would be a signal failure for us to see that record shattered in the third session of the 40th Parliament because we lacked the will or the wit to find a solution to this impasse."

I, too, have immense faith in the abilities of the honourable members of this House. I know that a solution can be found to this impasse. All sides need to exercise sobriety in this. Political fortunes should not be the motive for eroding the supremacy of Parliament or ignoring the best interests of citizens in this province. Assiduous attention should be paid to dealing with matters such as this responsibly.

Therefore, inspired by the precedent of Speaker Milliken's innovative ruling in this Afghan detainee case, I am going to presume leave of this House and set this matter aside for the moment. I ask that the three House leaders take it upon themselves to find a path that can satisfy the request of the estimates committee. If this cannot be accomplished by the end of the day, Monday, September 23, then I will return to the House with a statement on a motion by the member from Cambridge that would be appropriate in the circumstances.

I thank the member for Cambridge, the government House leader, the member for Timmins-James Bay, the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex, the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, the member for Nipissing, the member for Leeds-Grenville and the member from Beaches-East York for speaking to this matter, and I thank the member for Cambridge and the government House leader for their written submissions.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order for the member of Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Where do I start? I'm a little bit surprised. I just want—a couple things need to be said at this point.

First of all, what is clear is that there has been a prima facie case of contempt that has been found. If we look at the precedent in regard to what Speakers have done both

nationally and provincially, we have—you know, I can go through and cite all of the various cases, but the presumption has always been, on the part of the Speakers, except for the Afghanistan case, to immediately take up that matter before the House. The case of Afghanistan was very different because we were talking about national security and there was some sense on the part of everyone, "Okay, we kind of get it." But this, as you said, has nothing to do with that. You can't hide behind sub judice, client-solicitor privileges etc., in order to not produce the documents. There's a clear responsibility on the part of whoever is summoned before a committee to co-operate with the committee when it comes to evidence, including what is given as far as paper.

If you look at the various cases in 2001, March 19, the case of Speaker Milliken, there was such a case and immediately the motion was taken up. On March 9, 1998, under Parent, again, the motion was taken up immediately following the finding of a prima facie case of contempt. The list goes on. I'm not going to go through it because it would just be going on further.

But, listen, if the House leaders would have been able to resolve this by now, we would have done it. That's the point. It's abundantly clear, Speaker, that the government members at committee did not want to compel the minister to produce those documents. The minister didn't want to produce the documents, and I would presume that the government, in its whole, didn't want to produce those documents. If there was a way forward, there would have been some attempt on the part of the minister or the House leader to try to find a way for us to deal with this. That's why this is a matter that has to be taken up immediately by the House by way of motion. It is up to this House to decide at this point how we're going to deal with it and the precedent is pretty clear that it is us, the House, that makes these decisions and it's not, in this particular case, to be punted off to the House leaders. I'll wait for further comment from my colleagues, but I urge you strongly that we don't go down this path.

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We are currently trying to negotiate how we're going to get various legislation through the House, with the House leaders. We're trying to deal with trying to strike our committees. Throwing this into the House leaders' meetings, quite frankly, is not going to help the creation of committees in this House or the movement of the legislative agenda of the government through the House.

Your punting that issue to the House leaders' meeting, I think, is going to lead to very difficult House leaders' meetings at which the government's House agenda will be held up because we'll be seized with this matter. The government will never agree, and we'll have to come back in September and deal with the motion. So let's deal with it now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. I share the concerns of the member for Timmins-James Bay, but by way of clarification, I want to get

something on the record as well, in the interests of accuracy. September 23 is a Sunday, and in your ruling, you've indicated by Monday, September 23. I would like to get that on the record, that September 24 is the Monday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On the issue at hand, I share the view of my colleague from Timmins–James Bay that you have found a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege here and that the motion should be the next item of business.

We know what difficulties there have been in House leaders' meetings to this date, trying to re-establish committees, for example. We know that there has been less than co-operation on the part of House leaders on a number of matters. To believe that this matter will somehow be dealt with in the intervening week, I think, is asking a little much.

The committee was well aware, and I think the government was well aware, of what the likely finding of this motion on the breach of privilege would be, given Speaker Milliken's ruling on the Afghan detainee issue in the federal Parliament of 2010. Clearly, you have found a *prima facie* case for contempt here, for breach of privilege, and I think the matter should be dealt with forthwith by this House so that this does not linger on and on and on, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the official opposition House leader, I too want to join in previous colleagues' comments, both the member from Timmins–James Bay and the member from Pembroke–Renfrew—somewhere over there in eastern Ontario. It's a wonderful riding and a good member.

The fact of the matter is, this is such an important point of history for this Parliament. We've not dealt with this before. We've not dealt with the fact that the government refused to honour or respect a point of privilege by the honourable member from Cambridge and, at the same time, the estimates committee coming forward and demanding—requesting the production of documents.

I respect fully—we've all studied, as you obviously have, Mr. Speaker—obvious in your ruling and, I think, a very correct application of Speaker Milliken's previous rulings with respect to the Afghan case, and also the case of the production of financial documents by one of the committees of the House of Commons and a refusal of the government of the day to produce those documents.

Clearly, your ruling today is a shot across the bow to the government. The government should be ashamed of its actions in this case. As the honourable House leader for the NDP said, if we could have resolved this matter in both committee and in House leaders', we would have done so, I say respectfully, Mr. Speaker.

We can't even get the committees re-established in this House, I guess because the government doesn't want any more hearings on Ornge, and it probably doesn't want the estimates committee to be seized with this

matter, because it's got to be terribly embarrassing for the government when you had to go all the way to the Speaker to be told to do the right thing on behalf of the people of Ontario and disclose the financial numbers and the true cost around the political cancellation of both the Oakville power plant and the Mississauga power plant.

I have one request, Mr. Speaker, because I agree with the member from Timmins–James Bay that to punt this to House leaders is probably not the most productive thing to do, although I do respect that you did put a time limit on that, as Speaker Milliken did in the Afghan detainee case. I think we should deal with this matter on the floor of the House now and ask to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again, it's unprecedented for this Parliament to be seized with such a matter. The fact of the matter is, we can do it, move to committee of the whole House and try and deal with it here on the floor in a very public way. This matter should be dealt with in public, not in the secrecy of House leaders' meetings.

If that is not acceptable, I would ask at least the courtesy that the honourable member from Cambridge, whose privileges have been breached, be allowed to place his motion. He's prepared to place a motion to move this to a more appropriate committee so that this matter, again, can be dealt with in an open way, in an honest way, in a transparent way.

Once again, shame on the government for putting all of us in this position.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I just want to begin by saying that on this side of the House we thank you for your ruling. I'd also point out—although we've heard from members opposite—that I'm very respectful of standing order 13(b), which outlines that no debate shall be allowed on a Speaker's ruling. I respect the fact that, after much reflection, after research into precedents as well as what had happened with the committee, you have reached your conclusion.

Anyone who has been following this closely, anyone who had looked at the debate within estimates, with the submissions that were put forth, both orally and written—I know from my vantage point but I also know from the opposition—will know that we are dealing with an extremely complex and complicated matter. We are dealing with issues around solicitor-client privilege, around commercial confidences, around the power of committees, around many precedents and many issues, which as you pointed out today, that Parliaments—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First, I would ask—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. I would ask that everyone show respect when the Speaker is standing and not to add extra comments when I get silence.

Now, I would ask the government House leader to finish his point of order and that he not revisit the ruling but talk about what is the topic, and that is my recommendation.

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to thank you for the recommendation. I think that it recognizes the complexity of the situation. I just want to simply state that on this side of the House, we are very happy to comply with the ruling. I have a lot more optimism than the other speakers about the ability of House leaders to reach an agreement on this.

Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my colleagues, my two fellow House leaders, and I know that neither of them would ever want to leave the impression in the House that this has ever been dealt with at House leaders' meetings. In fact, it has never been a topic on the agenda. It was something that has been dealt with by estimates. Now that you have asked House leaders to take a look at it, it will go to the top of our agenda, and Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure you that the government will work cooperatively to find a solution to what, as I said and I think you have recognized, is a very complex situation.

So, again, I thank you for the ruling, and I stand here today to commit the government's full co-operation in reaching a solution by the date that you've put forward—or actually, I think the day after you put forward.

1100

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First, let me be clear about one thing. I appreciate the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke's correction of the date. It is the Monday that I am making reference to, and it shall be changed to the 24th. I appreciate that.

So that we have a clear understanding of what the points are to be made for this issue, I will come back to recognize the member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear, because we understand that you've made a ruling in regard to the prima facie case of contempt, and we're not arguing; that is decided. But you said you had a recommendation, and I think what the majority of the House is telling you here is that that recommendation is not going to work. The majority of this House wants this issue dealt with now, because the problem in punting this over to the House leaders, first of all, is, as I said, that the government and the opposition have not found a way to deal with this at House leaders. There doesn't seem to be a will to make that happen. The government has not reached out.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Listen, I think we should all be very calm here.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Well, then say things that are factual.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, thank you. It is pretty clear at this point that the House leaders have not dealt with this for a reason, and that is because it has always been felt that this was an issue that arose out of committee. It was brought to the House by a proper form, which was Mr. Leone to get up on his point of privilege. The normal precedent for these things to be dealt with is that the motion be taken up immediately. It is clear, Mr. Speaker—and I don't know how to tell you this any other way—that the majority of the House does not agree with your recommendation and believe that this matter—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Challenge the Chair.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No. Members should understand the standing orders. The recommendation of the Speaker is that he's reaching out, trying to find if there is some consensus for it to be dealt with in the way that you've suggested, and the majority of this House is telling you no. I would ask you to reconsider and to come back and deal with this now as a proper motion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the time that you took to rule on this matter. There were lots of back-and-forth documents that were going—transcripts from Hansard and letters from the House leader and myself and others who contributed to the debate when I rose on a point of privilege.

I do want to say, on the point of the prima facie breach, that I think the ruling is sound. I agree with that ruling. One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that I heard you say was that this direction that you want to, in essence, put this in the hands of the House leaders was a "recommendation." I think what this House is looking for from the Speaker is a directive to actually state that we have to solve this matter. I think we have to do that very firmly.

I can say, Mr. Speaker, being someone who was at estimates for the duration of this debate, that we tried to deal with this in estimates. We tried very long to deal with this in estimates. We spent more than seven hours—probably close to 10 hours—debating the various motions that were put before estimates committee. The estimates committee has been logjammed on the basis of the fact that we're dealing with this particular matter, and it just hasn't been able to be resolved there. I can see what happens if it goes back to estimates committee, where we'll have, time and time again, the kind of obstruction that we saw on the government side on all the things that we put forward in that committee.

We're here today because of the committee's failure to get the documents it has requested. That's why we're here today. We're here today because the estimates committee could not get the documents, and we're hopeful that this House can actually do its job: that the opposition can hold that government to account. That's our job.

I do want to make very clear, because I read and listened to the government House leader very intently with respect to his point, that the clarity of the motion did not suggest what we were actually looking for. I do want to restate that in the original motion, Mr. Speaker, we asked for all documents and all—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm loath to interrupt, but I want to remind the member that we're not talking about the issue of what went on before; we're talking about the point of order. The point of order is to talk about the recommendation.

Let me also be clear once and for all about this: Any recommendation I have is within my ruling. This is a ruling. This is not just one part, two parts, three parts; I'm making my ruling, and inside of it is a direction that the member has asked for.

Please finish your point of order.

Mr. Rob Leone: I don't have very much more, Mr. Speaker.

I also note in your ruling that you said that you were hopeful that the House leaders would be able to do that. I hope that hope turns into an absolute necessity, because we need these documents to do our job.

I do want to make it clear, though, that we asked for all documents at the Standing Committee on Estimates—asked for and requested them in the proper manner, going through the procedures that we knew. We couldn't do it in estimates, and I'm hopeful this House can finally get to the bottom of what happened with the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Point of order from the member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I'm appreciative of the fact that you concluded that, on the face of it, *prima facie*, there was a violation of privilege. I think that is obvious to all who read the transcripts, who sat through those committee hearings, who understand our function, our duties and our rights.

Speaker, we went through many days on this, and I'm saying that because in your recommendation to essentially put it back to the House leaders, you have to recognize that if there had been the potential in the course of those days to amend the demand for material, to heal the breach, then that could have well been done then, sir, through many a day of discussion. The motion that you considered that came from the committee had been amended in the course of discussion because we tried to work it down to the heart of it so that we could find what common ground was possible to find and move it forward.

This government does not recognize that it is not a majority. It does not recognize the legitimacy of the majority of this Legislature—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Again, I've been providing some leeway for comments on this issue, but the point of order and what I am listening for is not to challenge the ruling, not to revisit what my ruling is about, but to speak specifically about the recommendation within the ruling. I would like you to stay focused on that, please, without comment about the previous activities that have taken place on all sides. I'm talking about this particular issue here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. If I may complete my remarks: I understand the need to focus on

your recommendation within the ruling. Since we have already had the experience of seeing whether or not that sort of accommodation was possible aside from this chamber, I have concluded and I believe the majority have concluded that that isn't possible. We need the debate now and a decision by this body on how to proceed.

I would ask you to reconsider that part of your ruling.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member from Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to make reference to standing orders 13(a) and (b): "13(a) The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum, and shall decide questions of privilege and points of order. In making a decision on a question of privilege or point of order or explaining a practice, the Speaker may state the applicable standing order or authority." Then (b) goes on to state, "No debate shall be permitted on any such decision, and no decision shall be subject to an appeal to the House."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to add my voice to our House leader, the member from Timmins—James Bay, and, from the estimates committee, the member from Toronto—Danforth.

This is not a challenge to your chair, this is not in any way impugning on your ability to make rulings. What we're questioning here is simply the recommendation. With all due respect, sir, Milliken—there are many, many cases—and you, of course, have cited them yourself. The House leader has cited many others. There's no question that this is a *prima facie* case of a breach of privilege. We all agree on that.

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But we're talking here about the cost of relocating gas plants. We're not talking about a case of national security of Afghan detainees. We're talking about simple documents that point to simple costs. And surely, having gone the route that they've already gone and coming back to this chamber, it's pretty clear that this is the forum in which to deal with that.

Again, if it could be resolved at House leaders, it could have been resolved at the estimates committee. It was not resolved at the estimates committee. For the same reasons that it wasn't resolved there, it will not be resolved at House leaders. The majority of House leaders are—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: You know what? The Speaker ruled.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Excuse me. The majority of House leaders have already spoken.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You heard from the majority of House leaders. Our leader and the official opposition leader are in accord. That's two out of three, sir. How will it make any difference going back to House leaders than dealing with it today? Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First, let me be clear about assumptions: I won't make them. Let me also be clear that I am not suggesting, in any way, shape or form, that this House should not be considering this matter.

What I am asking, in my ruling, is to allow a specific named amount of time be dedicated to the House leaders to see if resolve could be found, and in the event that it's not possible, it will return to the House.

It is now time for oral—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, may I, on a point of order?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've made my ruling.

It is now time for question period. The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Acting Premier, the education minister: Minister, it's been 10 months since the election. We've actually gone backwards when it comes to creating jobs. The deficit's actually gotten larger, not smaller. You basically paralyzed any kind of decision-making by government to risk everything on a by-election for four and a half months, and now we find that we may be paralyzed here for some time because the energy minister refuses to release documents related to the cost of the Mississauga gas plant.

The House leader says, "Well, it's complex." The complexity seems to be deciding whether to use a printer or send forward an email—no more than that. I'd ask you to take some action.

To the minister: We found out that the deficit between 2010-11 went from \$14 billion to \$13 billion, in public accounts. That's only \$1 billion. Surely it's not going to take us 15 more years to get back in balance. That's not progress. That's digging the hole even deeper.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Certainly, on a day where public accounts is released—and we make it very clear that the deficit for 2011-12 is \$13 billion. It is \$3.3 billion ahead of the 2011 budget projections, 47% lower than forecast in 2009. At the same time, program spending growth was held below 1%, lower again than the 2011 budget target. We've been able to accomplish that, despite challenging fiscal times because we have made difficult choices.

One of those choices, which we believe is fair and responsible, is to freeze public sector wages, and that is allowing us to ensure that we create jobs and grow the economy. So on this, of all days, Speaker, I would hope that the Leader of the Opposition would say that we are on the right track.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, it took a year for us to get them to use words "wage" and "freeze" in the exact same sentence. We would actually have believed you, we would have given you even a bit of credibility, if you had stood on your feet and voted for Jeff Yurek's bill that would have frozen wages across the board back in the springtime.

You know, it's shocking, Speaker. Only the Ontario Liberals would applaud a deficit of \$13 billion. Only the Liberals would applaud a deficit that is greater than all the other deficits in Canada combined, times two—dramatically out of touch, Speaker. It's time for action—10 months of treading water, 10 months of spinning your wheels, 10 months of stopping to get out of this hole. Surely you've got to have some new ideas. One single bill this entire session: They're out of gas.

If you have no ideas, take ours. We'll balance the books; we'll grow the economy; we'll get Ontario moving again.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As the Leader of the Opposition talks about—he talks about fiction, frankly. Speaker, 325,000 jobs have been created since 2009, at the depths of the recession. That's 325,000 Ontarians who are employed, who can look after their families and who can have a future here in Ontario. That's almost half of all jobs created in Canada.

The tax reforms that have taken place in Ontario have resulted in Forbes magazine saying that Ontario is the top destination in the world for investment. We look forward to a day in this House when the Leader of the Opposition actually stands up for Ontario instead of putting it down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess she got me there. When I do talk about the Liberal budget projections, when I do talk about their plan, I guess we are talking about fiction, because there is no plan. Your plan continues to fail.

You're off on all of your numbers. You missed your targets by \$3.3 billion. That's not just a little bit of a miss, Speaker; it shows that they have no plan. They make up numbers and they fail to make any kind of progress whatsoever.

Here's the reality. Spending is up in 14 out of 24 ministries. The Drummond report came in the front door and went out the back door before you could blink. On-going scandals at the gas plants, at Ornge, at eHealth—you're digging a deeper and deeper hole. If you have no plans, you have no legislative agenda, then maybe it's time you hung up your skates and took our ideas to balance the budget, create jobs and get our province moving again.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Here in government, we need to do what families are doing at home—saving, paying their mortgage faster, watching budgets—and we are tightening our belt. I will say again: Program spending growth was held below 1%, lower than the 2011

budget target. Jobs recovered since the depths of the recession—let's be clear how we compare to others who are living through these same challenging times as we are in Ontario: The UK, 87% of jobs recovered; the USA, 46% of jobs recovered; here in Ontario, 122% of jobs recovered.

Let's focus on supporting Ontario families and making the decisions and the choices that put them first.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Acting Premier: I ask the Acting Premier to look at last month's numbers alone.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, they did create jobs. They added 30,000 more jobs to the public sector payroll. The problem is that we lost 55,000 jobs in the private sector. Under this government, we've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, and they've added 300,000 jobs to the public sector payroll.

It doesn't work. It can't balance. You can't have a healthy, sustainable public sector program without a thriving, healthy private sector. That's what they don't get. You can't add government jobs and reduce private sector jobs. That's a spiral to the bottom.

We have a better plan, Speaker, one that will focus on growing the economy, putting people back to work and, yes, reducing the size and cost of government.

I'll ask the minister with her numbers: Why in the world did you add on 30,000 government jobs last month when we lost 55,000 in the private sector? How do you reconcile those numbers?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Our plan, which we have set out in the budget and have been talking about here in the House for some time, is to ensure that we protect the public services that Ontarians rely on, that we protect education, that we protect health care and that we ensure that we protect public sector jobs and public services at the same time. It's a different approach than the federal government, than some US states, Speaker, where they're firing public servants and where they're cutting services.

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We all have a role to play in Ontario. Today's public accounts demonstrate that we can hold the line on spending, that we can protect public services and that we can put Ontario families first with a plan that is fair and reasonable and focuses on those services that Ontario families rely on each and every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: You've protected, I guess, government jobs. Already, you've added 30,000 to payrolls last month alone. When we lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, you added 300,000 government jobs, and you gave pay and benefit increases that are way beyond what's happening in the real world.

Let me go back and test the minister, then, on her new-found religion on wage increases. I want to congratulate my colleagues Mr. McNaughton and Mr. Shurman for pouncing on the MPAC scandal, forcing the

government to back down. Let me ask you: If you were so against what MPAC was doing, why, in your most recent collective agreement, did you give MPAC workers an 8.4% wage increase? At a time that you're saying you're freezing wages, Minister, I ask you, why did the government allow an 8.4% wage increase to MPAC tax collectors and assessors?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The Leader of the Opposition seeks to vilify those who are public servants who work in our schools and our hospitals every day.

We know what the plan of the opposition would be; we've seen it before. They fire teachers. They fire nurses. They want to privatize health care, and they want to cancel full-day kindergarten. That would put our recovery at risk, and it would put at risk the services that Ontario families rely on every single day.

Public education and public health care are the areas that families turn to, especially in challenging times, especially as we live through a worldwide recession and we need to come out of the other side of this. We need to ensure that those services are there when families turn to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Maybe I can get the minister to move aside from the talking points for a second and respond to this particular question. The minister was condemning MPAC yesterday, but under the same finance minister, they just signed a collective agreement from 2012 to 2015 that will give MPAC workers an 8.4% wage increase. You say you're going to freeze wages out of one side of your mouth, and you hand out an 8.4% wage increase. They will also now get 100% benefits when it comes to life insurance, from 75%. They enhanced vision care from 75% to 100%. Not only did you increase wages by 8.4%, you also gave out benefit packages that are way out of line with struggling families at home who don't get that kind of benefit but are asked to pay higher and higher taxes.

Minister, if you truly do believe in having a wage freeze—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —voting against it, then why in the world would you give an 8.4% wage increase through 2015 to MPAC workers and enhance their benefits?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The Leader of the Opposition certainly knows that all members of this House would agree that the conversations and what we've talked about in this House with respect to MPAC are not acceptable. But he also knows that it is AMO and the municipalities that need to look at the decisions that are being made with respect to MPAC.

When the decisions are ours to make on this side of the House, Speaker, we've made decisions to find a pathway forward, to make choices, to move forward with public sector wage freezes. We've just passed the Putting Students First Act legislation here in this Legislature, and we are asking our partners in the public sector to take a pause when it comes to wage increases. The Premier and

the Minister of Finance have been very clear that our request to do so would expand beyond that area that we have responsibility for. It is incumbent upon all of those in the public service to do their part.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question goes to the Acting Premier. The Speaker made it really clear today that the Minister of Energy is in contempt for refusing to disclose details of the cancelled power plants in Mississauga and Oakville.

My question is a very simple one: When will the government table the documents and disclose the details of that private power contract and the details of the estimated cost?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: We respect the Speaker's ruling and his recommendation. The Speaker suggests further discussions will be helpful, and we agree. We look forward to working, in an ongoing way, between the House leaders to resolve the issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Speaker has made it clear that the minister is obligated to disclose the information, but what's most concerning is that the Liberals should know better. Over a decade ago, this government came to power on a commitment that they described as follows: "We will make the government's business your business. We see it as an essential means of ensuring that decisions are made in the public interest. We will require that all future contracts signed by the government be subject to public scrutiny."

That's from your 2003 platform. What the heck happened to that commitment?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think all members of the House respect the fact that you have made a decision on this matter, and I think all members of the House are also aware that when we are talking about these documents, we are talking about a very complex situation.

The leader of the third party likes to quote. Let me quote the Auditor General at public accounts on September 5, when he was talking about these documents. He said, "My sense on the Oakville one"—that's the Oakville document—"where it's curriculum in arbitration, and taking into consideration Ms. Gélinas's comments about not disclosing any information, is that it could very well be that some of this information could be subject to client-solicitor privilege, or, even if we were to get it, in my opinion, it could be damaging to the province's negotiating position."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For nearly a decade, this government has made that private power deals would ensure affordable and reliable power and eliminate the politics from our electricity system. Instead, we're paying untold millions for decisions made by the Liberals' elec-

tion team and we have the most expensive electricity bills in the entire country that the people of this province are paying.

The people of Ontario are paying the bill. Why is the government hiding the information from them?

Hon. John Milloy: In terms of accountability, we have no lessons to learn. We are the government that gave the Auditor General power over the broader public service, including Hydro One and OPG. The Auditor General himself, on September 5, noted in the public accounts committee that the complexity of these documents—the fact that these documents could, in his words, damage the province's negotiating position; could, in his words, be subject to client-solicitor privilege—an officer of this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I respect the fact that your ruling recognized that this is a complex situation. I am optimistic that the House leaders can sit down, as House leaders have in other situations—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The members from Renfrew and Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order—now.

Hon. John Milloy: —and find a way for these documents to be viewed so that it can protect Ontario's position.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. I do think I need to remind the government House leader, though, that the ruling was that privilege was breached; that the privilege of the member is primary in this House.

The Speaker made it very clear: The minister is obligated to disclose this information. Yet when we've asked for it, when we have asked for this information, the government has used every single tactic in the book to hide the facts from the public. How can the minister claim concern for the public interest when he's blocking transparency?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: To the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm a little bit confused here, Mr. Speaker. We've had a ruling from the Speaker which has mandated the three House leaders to meet, to discuss a way forward in terms of the documents that have been requested. Is the leader of the third party suggesting that the New Democratic Party will not be part of these discussions?

I'm entering into these discussions with the spirit of optimism that, by the three of us working together, we can find a way to make sure these documents are produced, and produced in such a way that respects some of the concerns which were raised by the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Give me a break is all I can say. This government has played political games with

this issue from day one. This information does not belong to the government. It belongs to the people.

This government has blocked the auditor. They've refused to disclose via freedom of information, and now they've breached a member's privilege. When will we get the facts?

Hon. John Milloy: We are talking about a situation in which the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, has said, "Some of this information could be subject to client-solicitor privilege, or even if we were to get it, in my opinion, it could be damaging to the province's negotiating position."

What you have directed us to do is for House leaders to sit down. Mr. Speaker, I am quite frankly disappointed the New Democratic Party is not willing to sit down and find a way forward so that these documents can be looked at by the committee so that we can comply with your ruling in a way which does not damage the position of the government of Ontario. Again, Mr. Speaker, I ask her, is she standing here today and saying the New Democratic Party will not co-operate in this process?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You know, Speaker, the saddest thing of all in this mess that we're dealing with today is that 10 years ago this was a government that was elected on a mandate for change. Now they're employing the same secrecy that they used to rail against. People in this province deserve much, much better than that.

Will the minister disclose today and avoid all of the hassle that's going to come over the next week or so—actually disclose today the cost of the Liberal Party's private power deals and the details of the contracts for the Mississauga power plant?

Hon. John Milloy: I would remind members that the Minister of Energy appeared in front of the committee day after day and answered questions about a variety of issues related to his portfolio. The documents were released related to the power plant in Mississauga. Now in terms of Oakville, what we are talking about is a situation in which, as I just quoted several times, the Auditor General of this province himself has recognized that there are sensitivities; there is solicitor-client privilege and commercial sensitivities. You have asked the three House leaders to sit down and come forward with a solution to this situation.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed with the New Democratic Party that they are challenging your recommendation and that they will not co-operate in this process, one which, as I say, has been replicated in other Legislatures and in the House of Commons in terms of finding a way forward.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the energy minister. Minister, you've been found to have a breach of privilege and in contempt of Parliament. You know what, Minister? You can do the honourable thing today: Tell

your aides to print those documents and let us see what's—what are you hiding? What are you ashamed of?

Minister, will you tell your aides right now to print those documents so we all can see them?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I want to thank you for the ruling, for the consideration of the issues and for the very clear direction on the privileges of committees in the House. I understand the recommendation within the ruling and I understand, further, the government House leader's indication that he is prepared to pursue the recommendation. I also clearly understand that this matter returns to you.

Within the next week and a bit, I'm hopeful that those meetings will take place, but I very clearly understand that it returns to you on September 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm amazed each and every day I sit here and listen to the obstruction on that side of the House. What are you afraid of? What's in those documents that you're afraid of? What are you hiding? Does the word "contempt" not bother you?

Will the minister assure this House that the shredders won't be called in to continue the cover-up that we see in that ministry?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

The member from Cambridge will withdraw.

Mr. Rob Leone: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I was in the House with all other members and heard the ruling, it sounded clear to me: a clear review of the authorities and a clear direction that we return before you, against the backdrop of the clear review of the authorities. I am mindful of that. I will leave the other discussion to the House leaders. But I do know that on Monday, September 24 we return to the Speaker, who just made the original ruling, and I thank you for it.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Minister of Energy, who is in contempt of this Legislature: Minister, people are tired of your self-serving actions. People are upset that the Liberal government spent \$190 million to cancel a plant that they approved. How can you, Minister, continue to evade and to show contempt for this Legislature?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, the ruling that you made this morning sets out a clear direction and a path. I respect the ruling. Thank you for the ruling. We'll comply with the ruling.

The member was there during estimates, and we had a lot of discussion about various issues, including the Mississauga gas plant. He did outline the costs that we outlined, the overall costs, as soon as the resolution of that

matter had been reached. In fact, I attended a news conference which he was at, the day after the agreement to relocate that plant was signed.

I return to the ruling that you made. We will return before this House, where it is within your jurisdiction to assess the ruling itself. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, the ruling of the Speaker made it very clear: The information that you are withholding belongs to the people through this Legislature. People are tired of paying public money for the private goals of the Liberal Party. When will you provide this Legislature with the details behind the expenditures that you made?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The day after the relocation of the Mississauga plant had been concluded, I did speak to that issue. I spoke to the relocation. I spoke to the costs. I spoke to the issues and released a number of documents. The ruling of the Speaker is with respect to all documents. I'm aware of the ruling. We're all aware of the ruling. Thank you for the ruling. We respect the ruling. We'll see what the House leaders come up with. We know that we're back here on the 24th with respect to the ruling and with respect to the history and the obligations that that history entails.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Health. Investing in hospital capital projects is important, not only to ensure that residents have access to health care close to home but to also enhance the region's economic viability. A new hospital in Vaughan is important to me and my constituents in Richmond Hill, and I will continue to ensure that we move forward with this.

Many areas of the province have faced tough economic times, including southwestern Ontario. As you are well aware, Minister, there's a strong link between a robust local economy and the quality of health care services. In particular, communities need well-funded hospitals in order to attract the skilled workers who will be confident that they can raise their families close to accessible health care services. What investments has your ministry made to improve health care infrastructure and, through that, the economy in southwestern Ontario?

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Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Richmond Hill for reminding us of the many ways in which improving the quality of health care fosters stronger communities.

Let's take as one example Stratford, Ontario, in Perth county. We've invested over \$58 million in a major capital project: Stratford General Hospital. It's got a new emergency department, intensive care unit, surgical suites, and space for mental health and maternal-child services, along with the hospital's new MRI. It means that current and future residents of Stratford-Perth and surrounding communities will benefit from faster access to high-quality services.

But that's not all. Just this morning, I was very happy to read an article in the Stratford Beacon Herald that talks about improvements in the coordination of care, not only between hospitals, specialists and family doctors but also hospitals in the area.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Minister. A healthy rural Ontario is a key driver for our economic recovery, and we thank the front-line health care workers in Perth-Wellington for the great work that they do.

Minister, there are many communities in southwestern Ontario that are growing very rapidly. One that comes to my mind is Waterloo region. Many families are choosing this region to raise their families because of the promise of good jobs, vibrant neighbourhoods and quality health care. Minister, what types of investments are we making in this region so that this community can continue to grow?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There are so many, but let me give you one great example: Cambridge Memorial Hospital, a fantastic example of planning to accommodate for more patients. The emergency department will be able to serve an additional 10,000 visitors. The acute mental health unit will accommodate up to 25 patients. There will be an addition of 33 new medical surgical beds, five intensive care beds, two maternity beds and four additional pediatric beds. That's why I was so disappointed when the PC members dismissed our budget, because it contained a commitment to continue investments in more than 30 new major capital hospital projects, in addition to the 25 currently under way.

Cambridge is a growing community. We're proud to make investments to provide better health care for the people of Cambridge.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order, please.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My questions are for the Minister of Energy. Speaker, we'll try this in the good-cop fashion first. Minister, we've heard today that we have the right to know the real costs. We've already heard about the \$190 million in Mississauga. Those documents that we're looking for—we want to get to the bottom of the \$300 million-plus that is going for the sole-sourced contract to Lambton. We want to know if that sole-sourced contract into the Lambton plant includes additional payments.

Minister, the Oakville plant, at \$300 million to \$1 billion—this is the information that this House has learned that we need to get to the bottom of. Minister, there are 11 days that the Speaker has given us. Why would we use those 11 days? We already know what the answer is going to be. You're going to have to turn those documents over. Minister, we respectfully ask you to ask your staff to turn those documents over to us right now and put an end to it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Speaker has made a ruling. We'll comply with the ruling and we thank the Speaker for the ruling.

You've mentioned on a couple of occasions about a sole-sourced Lambton plant. Let's be clear: There was a contract for a plant in Mississauga. A same-sized plant is going to Lambton with the same company. So I'm not sure where you're coming up with an extra plant.

We've released a number of documents, we've released costs, and we'll be complying with the Speaker's ruling. I know that the next date on that is September 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Well, Speaker, sadly, good cop didn't work, so we'll try a little of the bad cop then.

The Speaker has ruled, "A prima facie case has been established." Minister, the jig is up. You've been caught red-handed. You're a lawyer; you know the next stage is to charge you with contempt.

Speaker, the minister is making both a mockery of this House and of you. You have nothing else to lose now, Minister. Bring us the documents today. Please, bring us those documents now. Put an end to this misery. Put an end to it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Respecting the Speaker's ruling, we'll be complying with the Speaker's ruling.

Of course, we reached an agreement to relocate the plant to Lambton on the Monday. On the Tuesday, we were before a number of the members of the House and a number of members of the press speaking to the relocation, speaking to the costs, speaking to some of the terms of the contract. We released a number of the documents. Your Speaker's ruling covers the rest, and I look forward to speaking to address that issue in compliance with the Speaker's ruling.

But just to be clear, there was a plant that was to go in Mississauga. It's the same-sized plant that will be going to Lambton, so there is no new plant. It's the same one that has been moved.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the government House leader. It is clear that during the process at committee that dealt with this issue in regard to the gas plants, your office and your staff directed committee members on the government side how to vote on all of the amendments and also drafted all of the amendments and all of the motions that dealt with this issue, trying to deflect having those papers delivered. Clearly, your office doesn't want to deal with this in such a way that the papers be given.

Why should we have any confidence in this House that you have any ability to find a solution to this?

Shouldn't this matter best be dealt with by a motion in the House today, forthwith?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I know that the honourable member would never want to leave the impression that the debate and discussion in committee did not draw out the fact that this is an extremely complex matter because we're dealing with issues of commercial confidence as well as solicitor-client privilege.

I've shared with members of this Legislature earlier in question period the words of Jim McCarter, "My sense on the Oakville one ... it could very well be that some of this information could be subject to client-solicitor privilege, or even if we were to get it, in my opinion, it could be damaging to the province's negotiating position."

Mr. Speaker, the member's own colleague the NDP Chair of the committee said this on May 16, "I would also advise—and I think the minister, being a lawyer himself, knows full well that he may choose to answer the question in such a way as not to prejudice the province in any way, and I would expect him to do so. That would be my ruling."

Mr. Speaker, this is a complex matter, and you've taken that into account in your ruling today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Members will know I have great respect for the government House leader, and I know that he's a very competent individual. He worked in the federal House of Commons as an assistant to Jean Chrétien in regard to legislative issues and understands well that the rights of the House trump everything. They trump prima facie—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The rights of the House trump everything. Those papers had to be delivered.

But what I just heard in your response is no change in direction. I hear you saying exactly what your committee members were saying back when estimates was dealing with this issue, and I don't get a sense that you're going to try to find any kind of solution other than trying to protect the Liberal Party.

So won't you agree with me that you haven't changed your mind and that we should deal with this matter forthwith, today in the House?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's contrary to the Speaker's ruling.

Hon. John Milloy: I fear—exactly, as my friend the deputy House leader says—that the NDP House leader is getting very close to challenging your ruling.

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I respect your ruling, Mr. Speaker. Those people who have examined the submissions that I made will know that your ruling did not favour the arguments that I put

forward, yet I respect it. At the same time, I have confidence that I can work with the other two House leaders to resolve this issue, as has been directed by the chair.

Mr. Speaker, I enter this with a spirit of co-operation and willingness to make sure that we can find a way to resolve this issue as House leaders and other bodies have, as you outlined today in your ruling.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Ms. Dipika Damerla: My question is to the Minister of Consumer Services. Minister, as you know, with 102 condo buildings in my riding, condo issues are a top priority for me. My office has gotten its share of calls from condo residents talking about how challenging it can be to navigate our Condominium Act. That's why, Minister, I am so pleased that you have decided to open the Condominium Act from top to bottom for a complete review.

Even more exciting is the fact that you are taking a very innovative approach to public engagement. Could you tell this House, Minister, what this innovative approach is?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I want to take this opportunity to thank the member from Mississauga East-Cooksville for her question and also to state my appreciation for her interest in the Condominium Act review.

Our Condominium Act review is using an innovative public engagement process. It has three stages that will enable condominium stakeholders and residents to participate, identify issues and develop solutions and recommendations. This public engagement process is being led by the Public Policy Forum.

Stage 1, the public information session, is already under way, and the recruiting of members for a condominium residents' panel as well. Letters have been sent to 10,000 condominium residents across the province, inviting them to participate. The panel will discuss issues relating to the Condominium Act and provide advice on how to improve it. In stage 2, condominium experts will review the findings to bring forward recommendations to update the act. In stage 3, the residents' panel will reconvene to review the experts' report, which will then be built into an action plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I'm excited to hear of the plan to address the issues affecting the overall sector review of the act.

I also want to say that I'm really pleased that instead of going for band-aid solutions, we are doing a complete overview of the Condominium Act. I'm also proud to be part of a government that is taking such innovative steps in public engagement before we complete the review.

Minister, I understand that you've already taken steps in this innovative approach. Could you tell this House how your first town hall on the condo issue went?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: It pleases me to inform the House that, indeed, I did hold an inaugural public information session last night in downtown Toronto. I had

the opportunity to meet and participate in conversations with condo owners, residents, developers, property managers and other stakeholders. This provided an opportunity for the many condo stakeholders and for community to come together to share issues of concern and to have conversations about the sector overall.

I would certainly like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague the MPP from Don Valley West for facilitating the session.

I will be holding similar public information sessions across the province and listening to Ontarians. I look forward to attending the public information session that the member will be hosting in her riding and talking to her constituents as well.

The approach that we are taking will truly engage—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: —owners and stakeholders so that we can further identify problems and develop solutions. Solutions created through this collaborative approach will benefit consumers and will result in a more efficient and effective marketplace, and will benefit Ontario consumers generally.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, I'm sure this is a tough day for you personally. I'm sure you're going to have resignations on your voice mail from members of your leadership team after today.

Minister, you could end this right now, but you don't want to. You want to conceal this scandal. Shame on you. You should be humiliated, sir.

Minister, do it now. Do the right thing. Hand it over. Hand all the documents over. Quit covering up your actions. What are you hiding?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

The member will withdraw.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I will withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you very much, Speaker. You made a ruling, a very clear ruling. I'm going to be complying with the ruling. I look forward to the results of the discussions between the government House leaders and know full well that we're back here on the 24th respecting the ruling.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Well, today is an extremely sad day in the history of the Ontario Legislature. This minister has an opportunity to do the right thing, and yet he's choosing to conceal information from hard-working Ontario families who pay the bills.

Minister, watching your government flounder is like watching a dead animal gasp for air. You continue to duck your ministerial responsibilities. Put yourself out of your own misery, Minister. Hand over the documents. Do the right thing. Quit concealing information that Ontario families deserve to know.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I took from the ruling, Speaker, which was very clear in its outline of privileges—and the wording around the recommendation was that the recommendation was attached to some of the issues that had been raised. I won't go further than that. That's what I took from it. And I took from it that the government House leaders were encouraged to pursue the recommendation and to see, but I also took from it, its very clear terms, that we're back here on the 24th. So I will, of course, and this House will comply with the ruling in all of its terms for all of the reasons contained in the ruling, which means we're back here on the 24th if a resolution hasn't been found.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You know, Ontarians watching this must be wondering, what in the world is in the documents?

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the Minister of Energy; sorry, Mr. Speaker. Ontarians watching this must be wondering what in the world is in the documents that the Minister of Energy is refusing to table. For over a year, this government and this ministry have ducked and dodged, refusing to tell the public how much of their money—not the Liberal Party's; their money—was spent scrapping private power deals that they themselves signed. Will the minister now admit that he was wrong to hide these facts from the public?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I spoke to a number of the costs with respect to the relocation of the Mississauga plant the day before the final day of estimates actually, and the day I spoke to it was the day after the agreement to relocate had actually been signed.

We're going to comply, of course, with the ruling of the Speaker, which has a number of terms put in there to both respect the privileges of the House and to explore further issues. That's what's going to be done. I know we're back here on the 24th, and so I look forward to the discussions, the examination of the recommendation and obviously the ruling.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Back to the Minister of Energy: The question is, if he's going to comply, why the delay? Why not do it now? Ontarians are wondering. People struggling in tough times are tired of seeing this government and the Liberal campaign team leave them with the bill for their mistakes.

The government has admitted that this was a political decision. The government has admitted it was because they were down in the polls. Now it's time to admit that they were wrong and come clean with the facts. Don't delay. Table the documents. Do it now. Will the minister do that?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're going to do exactly what the third party member has suggested, comply with the ruling—comply with the ruling—and that's what we're doing: complying with the ruling. And we're complying with the ruling in all of its context, not just the

documents that have already been released. But we're complying with all of the terms of the ruling, about the gas plant in Oakville and the one in Mississauga, which all three parties said they wanted cancelled, which all three parties would have had to find a way to either relocate or pay for, and which all three parties would have dealt with the issues of. But the ruling had a number of terms, and we're complying with all of them—not just select ones, but all of the terms of the ruling. One of those is that we're back here on the 24th.

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PROTECTION OF GREAT LAKES

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question this morning is to my friend the Minister of the Environment. I'd like to ask a question about the Kawartha Lakes, but today I'll ask a question about the Great Lakes. The minister recently introduced important legislation that, if passed, will ensure Ontarians can enjoy healthy, vibrant Great Lakes that are drinkable, swimmable and fishable now and in the future.

Conserving our Great Lakes water supplies and protecting our water quality is essential to ensuring the health of our families, our communities, and indeed, our economy. Speaker, through you, I'm wondering if the minister could provide exact details to the House on our government's proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think I can, and I know that all members of the House will be interested in this answer. I want to thank the member for the question.

The Great Lakes, as we all know, are vitally important to Ontarians and our drinking water and quality of life and even our prosperity. We need to restore them now to continue to enjoy their benefits for this and for future generations.

New challenges are overwhelming old solutions, and that's why we need new initiatives to help the Great Lakes. On June 6, I had the privilege of introducing the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act for first reading. The Great Lakes Protection Act would provide new tools to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The act would create a Great Lakes guardians' council to bring together government and interested parties to identify priorities and focus actions to address them. The act would enable targets to be set for Great Lakes improvements.

The Great Lakes are a global treasure. I look forward to support from my honourable opposition colleagues as we move forward with the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was a full, detailed and outstanding answer from the minister. I'd like to thank the minister for providing the House with the details of this very important act that we all should be very interested in.

Ontario relies on the Great Lakes for our strength and success, and I'm pleased to see that our government is taking full action to protect our lakes and restore them to environmental health. I understand that in combination with the bill, the ministry is also doing the Great Lakes

guardian community fund, an historic event in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, through you, I'm wondering if the minister could explain to the House the Great Lakes guardian community program.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much to the member. The Great Lakes guardian community fund is a \$1.5-million funding program that offers non-profit groups, such as service clubs, the opportunity to finance activities to support local community activities that restore and protect the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River basin. Funding is also available to First Nations and Métis communities and organizations in Ontario.

The funds will be distributed through modest grants valued up to about \$25,000 per project for actions that contribute to cleaning up the Great Lakes one small step at a time. Applications for the first round of funding will continue to be accepted until October 12, 2012, and interested not-for-profit groups may apply online by visiting the Ministry of the Environment website.

We want to say to all Ontarians: Become Great Lakes guardians so we can continue to enjoy Great Lakes that are drinkable, swimmable and fishable.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Acting Premier. On May 26, 2011, Eric Leighton, a grade 12 student at Mother Teresa High School in Barrhaven, was killed while doing school work in a classroom with a teacher. I know that the government is very aware of these circumstances, and I had the opportunity to speak with the Premier, the previous Minister of Labour and the previous education minister. I know that the Premier has spoken with Mrs. and Mr. Leighton, and I appreciate that. But Eric's parents, Sheri and Pat, are here today with their daughter, Kaitlyn, to ask for a coroner's inquest into his death. They're desperate for closure, for answers. They deserve to know all the facts. Will you work with the family today to ensure that a coroner's inquest is called immediately?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me start by saying to the family, our deepest condolences on the loss of your son, Eric. As a mom, I cannot even bear to think about the pain that you've gone through in this past period of time, and one of the most difficult days in my job as Minister of Education is the day I have to call schools and talk to the principals about a death of a child in those schools. On each and every incident, we try to look to what we could do more and what we could have done to prevent that situation.

A number of steps have been taken, and I can speak to those further in the supplementary, but I think it's important in Ontario that it is the coroner that makes the decisions. They have the expertise about whether and when a coroner's inquest should be called.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to thank the minister for her answer, but we have a bit of a problem, and I think

she can help us address it. Presently, the coroner has neither accepted nor rejected the pleas from the Leighton family to undertake a coroner's inquest.

I must reiterate: Eric was at a school. He was under the supervision of a teacher when he died completing an assignment. The Leightons still have questions, and they're concerned about school safety for their daughter now and other students. They're heartbroken that they sent their boy to school, and he never came home.

The coroner can automatically call an inquest into a workplace death, but in this case the coroner says that Eric's death doesn't qualify or fit the criteria such as a death on the job. This is interesting, given the Ministry of Labour investigated his death because the school was considered a workplace, and it was the Ministry of Labour who fined the Ottawa Catholic District School Board \$275,000 because it wasn't a safe environment. It makes no sense.

So I'm going to ask you, Minister, if you will undertake contacting the coroner to ask for this to happen, and will you change the rules so if, God forbid, another student dies at another Ontario school, that it will be grounds for an automatic inquest?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As the member opposite said, the Ottawa Catholic District School Board has been charged under the health and safety act, and I can assure you, Speaker, that if the coroner determines that an inquest should be held, if it is conducted, the Ministry of Education and the school board would absolutely cooperate fully.

I understand the need of the parents to have answers, but I think it's important for them to know that here in Ontario the politics are out of these conversations. It is the coroner who has the expertise to determine when and if an inquest is necessary. We look to the coroner to take the lead on that. But in Ontario, the government, school boards and school staff—each and every one of them—are committed to delivering the best and safest educational experience.

We know that there remain steps to do, because one situation such as this is too many.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Minister of Education. Today the Peel regional council will decide whether to close its 12 municipally run child care centres. Will the minister stand for the 760 children and their families who rely on these centres and work with the Peel region to keep these high-quality centres open, or will she stand by silently as more Ontario parents see their children denied good-quality child care services?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The government is dedicated to early learning in Ontario, and that's why we're leading the way with the introduction of full-day kindergarten. We know that early learning is the best investment we can make in Ontario's future prosperity. That's why child care funding for Peel region has more than doubled since 2003, from \$26.2 million to \$53.4 million in 2012, and 1,400 new child care spaces were created in Peel region

since 2003, and 4,500 more children are now receiving fee subsidies every year. But it is the region of Peel that is responsible for managing child care service in the system, and we look to them to do just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?
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Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The problem is that some of the best child care centres in this province are closing down, despite this funding that the minister is speaking of. From Windsor to Welland to Kenora, child care centres are being shut down and are closing on a regular basis. The reason for this, the reason for these child care centres closing, to quote child care expert Martha Friendly, is that the McGuinty government has “no provincial plan, limited policy and too little public funding” for these centres.

When will the minister step up for families in Peel and across Ontario, to stop the loss of Ontario's best child care centres, the models which other child care centres look up to, and to ensure that every family—every family—gets the affordable, good-quality child care that they need?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I would encourage the member opposite to engage in the biggest conversation that we have had in child care in this province in decades. On June 27, we released a discussion paper called *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario: Sharing Conversations, Strengthening Partnerships, Working Together*. We are looking for the best advice. The paper outlines the government's long-term vision for child care, and we encourage partners and other interested parties to provide feedback.

But having a dialogue is not the only step that we've taken. In this past budget, an additional almost more than \$200 million has been invested in child care. Since 2003, child care funding has increased from \$532 million to more than \$1 billion—a 90% increase—and this at the same time as we're rolling out full-day kindergarten right across this province.

We have very much focused on the education and learning of our youngest learners and look to continue to do just that.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation. The growth of tech companies is very important to southwestern Ontario. Many new tech companies have sprung up in the region, and several existing companies continue to expand and grow. It's very important that we do everything we can to create the right conditions for these businesses to thrive, grow and continue to create jobs for southwestern Ontarians. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is this government doing to ensure our information communication technology sector remains strong and does in fact create jobs in southwestern Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I've got to tell you, our information communication technology sector is the best in the country and in the top three in all North America.

This sector contributed \$28 billion towards Ontario's gross domestic product, and it employs 270,000 people.

This government believes in this industry, and that's why we've made investments in companies like Desire2Learn in Waterloo. When governments show confidence in companies, the private sector often does too. I was pleased to learn recently that Desire2Learn secured an \$80-million investment from the private sector. This is the largest venture capital investment in a Canadian software company ever.

Our plan is working and we will continue to support businesses, continue to work to grow the economy and create jobs in the province of Ontario.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On a point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order related to your ruling earlier, and I'm seeking a bit of clarification. There have obviously been questions asked and other members have stated.

Your direction to the House leaders—and we will be meeting later today, as is our usual routine—is that we report by the end of the day on Monday, September 24. I guess I'm asking, seeking direction from you, as to how we are to communicate to you if we have reached an agreement. Are you looking for a submission in writing from us? Are you looking to meet with us? Does this have to be done by the end of day September 24, or are you saying you'd like it done prior to the date?

I'm also interested—typically, the member making a claim of privilege includes the motion they are planning to move. I'd like to ask, through you, Mr. Speaker, if the member could provide a copy of that motion, because it was not included in his submissions. So I'm searching for some direction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): One moment, please.

I thank the member for the point of order. For clarity purposes, if the three House leaders, at any time up to the 24th, come to some kind of conclusion that they wish to report, that all three agree upon, they may transmit that to me in any form, preferably in writing, and if not, electronically. As for the member from Cambridge, it is his purview to decide to provide that for you if he wishes to do so.

Further clarification on this point of order? The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Same point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's pretty clear at this point that the government is trying to figure out how they can contrive to write the member's motion, and I find that, quite frankly, somewhat offensive.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't find that to be a point of order, so I'll entertain the member from Cambridge.

Mr. Rob Leone: As the government House leader has sought some clarification on that direction, I would hope

that the government House leader and the House leaders, when they convene, are going to be able to provide not only a copy of the letter to you, but also to copy all members of this House, as this is a matter before the House, and we would like to know what happened at the House leaders' meeting, and if minutes could be provided in those documents.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have provided the directions to the House leaders, and what they choose to do is what is inside of the ruling.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1217 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: We'll have some guests joining us, but I just wanted to take the opportunity to say their names now, in case I don't get the opportunity to later: Adam Diamond, who's the provincial program coordinator for YouthCAN, a program of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies; Tim Sond, a second-year Master of Social Work student at the University of Toronto, completing a practicum at the Ontario Association of CASS; and Brian Van-Du, a coordinator on the YouthCAN team, as well as a first-year Bachelor of Social Work student at Ryerson, will be joining us and will be here to watch the second reading of Bill 90.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We will welcome our guests.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'd like to welcome our guests from Denmark. They came to visit one of my schools earlier this week, Sir William Osler. I want to welcome them to the Legislature. Thank you for visiting us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introduction of guests—and asking the member from Scarborough—Agincourt not to step on my special gift of introducing my guests. I want to take this moment: In the Speaker's gallery today is the Committee on Children and Education of the Parliament of Denmark, including all members from all parties. The total number is about 27 on the committee. The delegation is here to meet with MPPs, ministries and myself to discuss education models and legislation in both Ontario and Denmark.

Please give our guests a warm welcome and bid them adieu. They're leaving this evening.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PERSONS

Ms. Laurie Scott: Today marks the founding of the newest chapter of CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. Haliburton Chapter 54 is being officially launched this afternoon at the Royal Canadian Legion in Haliburton.

CARP is a national organization with over 660,000 members, advocating on issues related to aging, providing benefits like travel insurance and creating a social space for like-minded people.

Since the focus of CARP's advocacy is on aging issues, its membership is not confined to actual retired people. In fact, many young members are equally committed to ensuring that these issues are adequately addressed.

CARP's vision is for a society in which everyone can live active, independent, purposeful lives as they age. CARP advocates for social changes that will bring financial security, equitable and timely access to health care, and freedom from discrimination for an aging population. It is also committed to ensuring that our aging citizens are protected from excessive tax burdens and restrictions, which would impair their quality of life.

CARP's Chapter 54 in Haliburton is a welcome addition to our community. I want to congratulate Bob Stinson and the steering committee for all the work they have done to ensuring the successful establishment of this chapter.

I also want to wish Chapter 54 the very best in all of its future endeavours. I'm sorry I can't be with you there this afternoon in the Haliburton Legion, but I'm sure you're having a great time.

CORDUKES/WEBER 12-SIDED BARN

Mr. Michael Mantha: Over the course of the summer, I had the opportunity to attend the twine-cutting ceremony—one that I'm proudly wearing today as my bow tie—at the historic Cordukes/Weber 12-sided barn in the town of Sowerby in Algoma-Manitoulin.

In 1919, Thomas Priestman Cordukes, a pioneer and first reeve of Thessalon township, built Ontario's first and Canada's second-known 12-sided barn, the first being in Mystic, Quebec, which was likely modeled after the 12-sided railroad roundhouse in West Virginia.

Between 1919 and 1990, this barn housed livestock and crops for a succession of farmers, including the Cordukes, the Canns, the Seabrooks and, most recently, since 1976, the Webers. It has stood vacant since 1990 and it was in danger of collapse.

In 2004, some community members, with the owner's assistance, decided to try and save it. The work, partly supported by a provincial grant, took several years and many, many days of volunteer time and tremendous support from all sectors of the community. I am delighted to say that the barn is now fully restored and ready to serve and strengthen that same community. This unique 12-sided barn is now available for rent for private functions, and is available free of cost for any community event.

They say it takes a community to raise a child, but in Sowerby I saw that it took a community with drive, passion and pride to take on and complete something of this scale, of this magnitude. While many in the community dedicated their time, I would like to especially acknowledge the efforts of Will Samis and David Ratz

for their tireless efforts towards the completion of this project.

I am proud to see what can happen when a community unites, works hard and accomplishes such projects that will truly be of benefit to all and strengthen relationships in their community and their region.

AGINCOURT COMMUNITY SERVICES ASSOCIATION

Ms. Soo Wong: Today I would like to recognize Agincourt Community Services Association, a fantastic association located in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt. For nearly 35 years, better known as ACSA, it has worked within the Scarborough area to address a variety of issues, including systemic poverty, hunger, housing, homelessness and unemployment. Its main objective is to act as a bridge between people who need help and those who can provide it.

Recently, ACSA has developed a civic awareness project, a three-year program developed to address a gap in involvement of Scarborough immigrant communities in civic activities. The civic awareness project, better known as CAP, works with newcomers in Scarborough to gain awareness, knowledge and skills for civic engagement and to develop strategies on how to resolve issues impacting their community. CAP benefits newcomers by increasing their connections to the community through finding ways to make the world around them a better place.

The rewards of CAP can already be seen. One graduate stated, “Before now, I didn’t have the knowledge and confidence to bring community issues to light and speak up as a contributing member of society. Now I know how to gather information about issues that are affecting members of my community and how to engage our fellow community members so together we can support each other and advocate for needed change.”

As a community, as a multicultural province, it is important that all of our newcomers have the ability to make a difference in our society, and I’m proud to have an organization like ACSA in my riding which works to achieve this goal.

NORTHERN ONTARIO RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I’m very concerned that northern Ontario is at the tipping point, thanks to policies of this government. The uncertainty over the future of Ontario Northland, coupled with the Far North Act, will have very adverse effects for exploration in the north. The Far North Act puts almost half of the north, 225,000 square miles, off limits to exploration. Indeed, if this legislation had been passed sooner, we would never have seen the Ring of Fire discovered. That’s the world’s largest mining find of this century.

Three of the world’s largest exploration companies, several smaller exploration companies and 70 mining and

manufacturing companies are located in the riding of Nipissing. Any further instability could have adverse effects on our industry. Having this government cut exploration in half will certainly have a negative effect on these businesses.

On my recent tour of northern Ontario with MPP Norm Miller from Muskoka—Parry Sound, one customer of Ontario Northland told me that they’ve delayed a \$10-million expansion simply due to uncertainty caused by the government’s lack of a plan in its fire sale of Ontario Northland. We need a new direction from this government, and soon. We heard just this week that we used to be number 1 in the world in mining, and today we’ve fallen to number 13. We need to continue to stave off this economic fallout.

PATHWAY OF FAME

Mr. Jeff Leal: I’d like to take a moment to pay tribute to Sean Eyre, Johnny Driscoll, Graham Hart, Ada Lee, Barb Bell, Father Bernie Heffernan and John Morris for recognizing the need in our community to acknowledge in a definitive manner those who contribute significantly to the betterment of Peterborough.

Under the direction of Mr. Ken Doherty, in 1997 this group came together to establish the Pathway of Fame. The first stone was laid on Saturday, July 18, 1998, in Del Cray Park.

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Residents of Peterborough are nominated by community members for various reasons. Some contribute in the arts and culture, others for humanitarian reasons, but everyone whose name appears on the Pathway of Fame is a worthy recipient, even including former Prime Minister Lester Pearson. These individuals have given of themselves to their communities. They have used their talents and donated their time to develop and grow Peterborough into the great community it is today. Their names as part of the Pathway of Fame will ensure that their efforts and contributions are never forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, September 8, 2012, I had the great pleasure of attending the Pathway of Fame ceremony in Peterborough where this year’s inductees were announced. I’d like to offer my personal congratulations to each and every one of them and to all those whose names already pave this historical pathway.

PARKINSON SUPERWALK

Mr. Jim McDonell: Last Saturday, I was able to attend the first Parkinson SuperWalk fundraising event in Cornwall. The Parkinson Society volunteers, families and supporters not only raised the awareness of this terrible disease but they also raised close to \$10,000 to help in the expansion of services provided by the Parkinson Society in eastern Ontario. These are dedicated residents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry who care about their community and those afflicted by this terrible disease.

Community fundraising is an important avenue for local charities and not-for-profits to obtain the necessary funds to operate and deliver services to those in need with efficiency and compassion. When local volunteers and activists initiate a community fundraising event and manage to raise close to \$10,000, they are to be commended and recognized. They're an example and an inspiration to many.

In the upcoming years, as baby boomers age, we are likely to experience an increase in the incidence of neuro-degenerative conditions, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, in our communities. This comes at a time when our focus on health care is being driven towards efficiencies and a greater reliance on community care. I cannot emphasize enough how important research and support groups such as the Parkinson Society of Canada will be to Ontarians affected by these conditions and their families.

I wish all these volunteers the best and look forward to future Parkinson SuperWalks.

OMBUDSMAN OF ONTARIO

M^{me} France G  linas: In a few minutes, I will be introducing a private member's bill to expand the oversight of the Ombudsman to the health care sector. Ontarians need access to an independent investigator who can get to the bottom of their issues with our health system. Currently, the only oversight mechanisms at most health care organizations are internal or left to the Ministry of Health, and we frankly know that this is not cutting it.

Ombudsman oversight of hospitals has been shown to reduce outbreaks of hospital-acquired infection; in retirement homes and long-term-care homes, they protect vulnerable seniors from abuse; in the ambulance service, it could have prevented the never-ending Ornge fiasco—and the list goes on.

Many Ontarians have tried and demanded this change. After the death of her mother, Maria Daskalos collected 5,400 signatures on a petition that my colleague from Toronto–Danforth presented. Members on all sides of the House have presented petitions, from Niagara to Owen Sound, London, Peterborough, Guelph and many more.

As I speak, hundreds of people on Facebook groups, like Cause for Concern and Fair Care Canada, are asking for Ombudsman oversight of health facilities. The Ombudsman himself spent a third of his report last year calling for the mandate to oversee health facilities because he received so many complaints.

Mr. Speaker, it's time—time to recognize the need for oversight of our health care system, time to listen to the many, many Ontarians who need closure.

FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I rise today to speak about Ontario's food processing sector. I'm proud to be part of

a government that fully supports investments in Ontario's food processing sector that will create new jobs, introduce innovative processing technology and use locally produced inputs.

Yesterday, as we know, the Alliance of Ontario Food Processors was at the Legislature and released a report which reaffirms that the Ontario food and beverage industry is the province's second-largest manufacturing sector after the auto sector, generating \$34.8 billion in revenue from goods manufactured and employing more than 94,000 people.

Members of this House will be interested to note that programs and services from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs led to investments of \$490 million in the food processing sector in 2011-12 and created and retained more than 7,300 jobs in the province. As members of this House are aware, Ontario's food sector supports and impacts rural communities and primary agriculture. Nearly 25% of the province's processors are located in rural areas, and processors purchase almost 65% of Ontario food-related farm production.

I'm glad to see the government determined to continue to help this important part of our economy to succeed in global markets and create jobs here at home.

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL RECIPIENTS

Mr. John O'Toole: It was my privilege to join our federal member, the Honourable Bev Oda, to present medals to distinguished citizens in my riding of Durham. The medals were honouring the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen of Canada. The citizens have distinguished themselves in initiatives such as business, culture, fundraising, environment, education, public service, outstanding leadership and volunteerism in service to their community, their province and their country.

I am pleased to introduce the following Diamond Jubilee Medal recipients: Brian Callery, Dr. William Cohoon, Mary Ann Found, Hannu Halminen, Harold Hammond, Kirk Kemp, Rev. Frank Lockhart, Mayor Gerri Lynn O'Connor, Don Simmonds, Joan Randall, Heather Rutherford, Anna Strike, George Van Dyk, Edmond Vanhaverbeke, Dr. Anthony Brown, Dan Carter, Hazel Coates, Eleanor Colwell, James Connell, Dr. Jack Cottrell, Lieutenant-Colonel John Conrad, Rodine Egan, Kent Farndale, John Greenfield, William Hine, Sid Ikeda, Robert Kirvan, Rose Kuipers, Margaret Maskell, Frank Moore, Erin O'Toole, Dr. Paul Puckrin, Elva Reid, Gail Rickard, Marion Saunders, Jillian Smigielski, Alan Strike, Charles Taws, Mary Taylor, William Tomlinson, Benjamin Voss, Kathleen Wasylenky, Sandra Will and Anne Wright.

I would ask all members to recognize these citizens for service to their community and to our country, Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT ACT (INVESTIGATION OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'OMBUDSMAN (ENQUÊTES SUR LES SERVICES DE SOINS DE SANTÉ)

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to investigating specified health care services / *Projet de loi 122, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman en ce qui a trait aux enquêtes sur des services de soins de santé précisés.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Le projet de loi modifie la Loi sur l'ombudsman pour qu'il soit capable d'investiguer des plaintes qui proviennent des maisons de soins de longue durée, des centres d'accès aux soins communautaires, des hôpitaux, des services ambulanciers, des services de santé publique, ainsi que les services dans les maisons de retraite.

The bill amends the Ombudsman Act to give power to the Ombudsman to do anything under the Ombudsman Act to a home for special care, a long-term-care home, a community care access centre, a hospital, an ambulance service, a board of health, as well as the care services provided at retirement homes.

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PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier McGuinty has imposed fee schedule cuts to family physicians and proposed wage freezes unilaterally, he has therefore alienated the province's family doctors. These actions threaten the future of health care in Ontario and will compound the existing family physician shortage. As wait times for primary care will inevitably increase, so will the frustration of millions of Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the Premier reconsider his decision and return to the negotiating table with the Ontario Medical

Association and the province's doctors, thereby working alongside patients," working together, moving forward, "and their primary care providers" in the province of Ontario.

I'm pleased to support it, sign it and present it to Katherine, one of the new pages here.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term-care homes; and

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don't complain because they fear repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

"Whereas Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care home system;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly "to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include Ontario's long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Caelius to bring it to the Clerk.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas it is the right of every Canadian to vote once in each election for the candidate of his or her choice and have their vote fairly counted and not offset by faulty voter registration or any sort of illegal practices; and

"Whereas credible allegations of voting irregularities exist for the most recent election, including non-citizens voting, persons voting multiple times at various voting stations and errors on the permanent register of electors list; and

"Whereas the practice of 'vouching' has been practised in polling stations where it is not permitted, such as non-rural polling stations, and does not require verified proof of a person's age, citizenship and residence in a riding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support Bill 106, Prevention of Electoral Fraud Act, 2012, by Bas Balkissoon, the member for Scarborough-Rouge River, that would require that voters present proof of Canadian citizenship; require the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario to appoint an independent party to conduct a review of the permanent register of electors within six months after the bill passes and subse-

quently every five years; allow scrutineers to monitor the process by which voters add their names to the voters list on election day; and forbid vouching, which currently excludes the requirement for legitimate identification.”

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Zakhar.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt;

“Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and Oak Ridges moraine;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier government to plan, protect and enforce clear, effective policies governing the application and permitting process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries;

“Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Minister of the Environment initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent contamination of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt.”

As I am in agreement with this, I’ve affixed my signature to the petition to give it to page Sashin.

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’ai une pétition qui me vient d’un peu partout en Ontario.

« Attendu qu’il existe un nombre croissant de cas signalés d’abus, de négligence et de soins de qualité inférieure pour nos personnes âgées dans les foyers de soins de longue durée;

« Attendu que les personnes ayant des plaintes ont peu d’options, et souvent ne le font pas parce qu’ils craignent des répercussions, ce qui suggère qu’un trop grand nombre de personnes âgées sont laissées dans des situations vulnérables, sans surveillance indépendante;

« Attendu que l’Ontario est une de seulement deux provinces au Canada où l’ombudsman n’a pas de contrôle indépendant de nos foyers de soins de longue durée. Nous avons besoin de la responsabilité, de la transparence et de la cohérence dans notre système de soins de longue durée. »

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario « d’élargir le mandat de l’ombudsman afin d’inclure les

foyers de soins de longue durée de l’Ontario, afin de protéger nos aînés les plus vulnérables. »

Je suis en accord avec cette pétition, monsieur le Président. Je vais la signer et demander à Leo de l’amener aux greffiers.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is presently an interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study under way to locate a new bridge across the Ottawa River east of the downtown of Ottawa;

“Whereas the province of Ontario is improving the 174/417 split and widening Highway 417 from the split to Nicholas at an estimated cost of \$220 million;

“Whereas that improvement was promised to and is urgently needed by the community of Orléans and surrounding areas;

“Whereas the federal government has moved almost 5,000 RCMP jobs from the downtown to Barrhaven;

“Whereas the federal government is moving 10,000 Department of National Defence jobs from the downtown to Kanata;

“Whereas over half these jobs were held by residents of Orléans and surrounding communities;

“Whereas the economy of Orléans will be drastically impacted by the movement of these jobs westerly;

“Whereas additional capacity will be required for residents who will have to commute across our city to those jobs;

“We, the undersigned, call on the province of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation to do their part to stop this environmental assessment; and further, that the new road capacity being built on 174 and 417 be kept for Orléans and surrounding communities in Ontario; and further, that the province of Ontario assist the city of Ottawa in convincing the federal government to fund the light rail from Blair Road to Trim Road, which is much more needed now that 15,000 jobs accessible to residents of Orléans are moved out of reach to the west.

“We, the undersigned, support this petition and affix our names hereunder.”

I support this and I send it up with Jasper.

PET GROOMERS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the public is seeking to have all animal pet groomers registered and licensed for the safety and protection of our animals and adhere to a strict code of conduct and ethics,

“It is requested that the groomer act be law and that a public register is available online for the public to verify the qualifications of the groomer they are entrusting their pet to.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"For the groomer act to become law, thus bringing all groomers under one governing body, allowing for universal testing to occur, and for all groomers and pet grooming businesses to be registered as practitioners, thus elevating the education of groomers to a higher level in animal safety, hygiene and grooming skills. This will offer the public and all pet owners increased consumer confidence and, above all, animal safety and care when they are entrusted to a groomer/business for animal pet grooming."

I'm glad to pass this to Zakhar.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury:

"Whereas the Ontario government" has made PET scanning "a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients under" certain "conditions...; and

"Whereas," since 2009, "insured PET scans" are performed "in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with" Health Sciences North, "its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through" Health Sciences North, "thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Leo to bring it to the Clerk.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition here signed by some people from Ontario. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

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"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by ... Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

Speaker, I agree with this and will send it to you with Maya.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. (Hydro One) is proposing construction of a new transformer station on a 100-acre site in Clarington, near the Oshawa-Clarington boundary;

"Whereas the site is on the Oak Ridges moraine/greenbelt;

"Whereas concerns have been raised about the environmental impacts of this development, including harm to wildlife as well as contamination of ponds, streams and the underground water supply"—aquifers;

"Whereas sites zoned for industrial and/or commercial use are the best locations for large electricity transformer stations;

"Whereas most, if not all, residents do not agree this project is needed and that, if proven to be necessary, it could be best accommodated at alternative locations such as Cherrywood or Wesleyville;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Ontario Legislature" and the Minister of Energy, Mr. Bentley, to "support the preservation of the Oak Ridges moraine, the greenbelt and the natural environment at this site. We also ask that the Ontario Legislature require the Clarington transformer station to be built at an alternative location zoned for an industrial facility and selected in accordance with the" Environmental Protection Act and the best planning possible.

I'm please to sign and support this petition and present it to Sashin.

LITS DE BRONZAGE

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai une pétition qui me vient des gens de Nickel Belt.

« Attendu qu'il y a des preuves qui relient l'usage des lits de bronzage à l'augmentation des risques de cancer, que l'Organisation mondiale de la Santé considère les lits

de bronzage comme un cancérigène du groupe 1 et que l'usage des lits de bronzage avant l'âge de 30 ans augmente le risque de mélanome par 75 %;

« Attendu que plusieurs groupes, incluant la Société canadienne du cancer et l'Association médicale de l'Ontario, appuient l'interdiction de l'usage des lits de bronzage par les jeunes de moins de 18 ans;

« Attendu que les provinces de la Colombie-Britannique et de la Nouvelle-Écosse ont adopté des lois qui interdisent aux jeunes d'utiliser des lits de bronzage, et des gouvernements au travers le monde considèrent des lois similaires;

« Attendu qu'une grande partie de la population appuie l'augmentation de la réglementation de cette industrie, avec 83 % qui appuient l'interdiction du bronzage artificiel au moins de 18 ans »;

Ils demandent à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario « de passer une loi pour interdire l'usage des lits de bronzage aux jeunes de moins de 18 ans, sauf pour des raisons médicales ».

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je demande à Zakhar de l'amener aux greffiers.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Residential Tenancies Act protects tenants in dwellings and long-term-care homes from sudden and unfair increases to their rent; and

"Whereas ancillary costs such as the provision of meals and other services in a long-term-care facility are not subject to the jurisdiction of said act; and

"Whereas there have been episodes of repeated, large and unjustified increases to the stated costs of meal provision in long-term-care facilities in Cornwall and area; and

"Whereas residents do not have a say in the procurement and administration of meals and other services provided by the facility, nor can they opt out of such services when notified of an increase in charges, being thus committed to a 'take it or leave it' choice;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) To instruct the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to enact regulations ensuring fairness, protection and choice for residents of long-term-care facilities that provide any other necessary service such as, but not limited to, meals and personal assistance at extra cost to their residents;

"(2) To instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to undertake a comprehensive review of the administration of long-term-care facilities with respect to the provision of services other than lodging that involve an extra charge to residents."

I agree with the petition and will be signing it. I'm passing it off to page Leo.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT BILLS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE DES PROJETS DE LOI ÉMANANT DU GOUVERNEMENT

Mr. Harris moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 109, An Act respecting government bills / Projet de loi 109, Loi concernant les projets de loi émanant du gouvernement.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael Harris: I must say, it's quite an honour to have the opportunity to debate my first private member's bill in this House.

I'd like to start where I left off at my press conference this morning, by talking a little bit about why I believe in this House. We need to work together to make government more accountable to the people of Ontario.

I'm sure all members have heard from their constituents before, that government needs to be more transparent. It's something I hear from my constituents in Kitchener–Conestoga and from Ontarians across the province all the time. After I first talked about my bill on 570 News in Waterloo region back in June, I had many residents come to me and say that they are fed up with the lack of openness in government decision-making. Unfortunately, the current accountability deficit with the Liberal government has even caused some Ontarians to give up on the political system altogether. In fact, recently I had a gentleman tell me that he stopped voting because he feels that, no matter what he or other members of the community do, the government will continue to spend money with no forethought and withhold critical information to assessing the financial impact that new laws will have on the public.

I think it's really important to note that these comments aren't just idle grumbings; they're legitimate concerns that have been developing over the last nine years. Unfortunately, since 2003, Ontarians have witnessed the Liberal government waste billions of dollars on scandals and pet projects like Ornge, eHealth, the feed-in tariff program and cancelled gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville. With all this waste and corruption, many Ontarians now believe our political system is broken. And with voter turnout at less than 50% in the general election last year, I hope you all can agree that we need to change the way we do things here at Queen's Park.

I know there are some people who are comfortable just keeping business as usual, and some may even feel it's unnecessary to provide more information online, analyzing the costs and benefits of government legis-

lation. In fact, when I first introduced Bill 109 in June, I had some members of the media tell me that the public already has opposition parties, reporters and columnists to analyze and assess government legislation in order to determine what's important and what's not.

Don't get me wrong, I'm flattered and pleased that the media has so much faith in the opposition MPPs, and themselves, to hold the government to account. But I utterly reject the notion that it's somehow unnecessary to provide Ontarians with greater access to information about government decision-making. Just because your car is running doesn't mean you don't take it in for a tune-up, and just because we already have checks on government authority doesn't mean we don't need any more.

As elected representatives, we all know that a major part of building a robust democracy consists of providing everyone with a meaningful opportunity to contribute to the political process in a society. We know that an educated, engaged and politically active public is the best protection against waste, corruption, incompetence and scandal in government. But this goal is difficult to achieve when a large portion of the population doesn't have the tools necessary to effectively assess the costs and benefits of proposed government legislation. That's why I tabled the Transparency in Government Bills Act: because I believe this bill takes the critical first steps to re-engage Ontarians in the political process by requiring the government to provide accessible information online about each government bill. My bill, if passed, would require the government to explain to the Ontario public the financial, economic, social and environmental implications of its bills.

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We also have to start acknowledging that we live in a technological age where people are relying less on traditional sources of information and turning more to the Web to do their own research before making big decisions like sending a son or daughter to school, purchasing a new home or starting a new business. Unfortunately, though, they'll find very little information online about proposed laws that will affect the livelihood of their families and businesses, either because the government hasn't released its own research, or it hasn't actually conducted a proper analysis.

You know, before I was elected, I worked in the private sector at Honeywell. I can tell you that we didn't make a single business decision without first carefully examining the costs and benefits. Whether we were hiring new employees, purchasing new equipment or investing in new markets, we took the time to make sure that every decision was sound and would benefit the company. Since I got to Queen's Park, I have to say that I've been surprised to see that the government doesn't do a similar analysis when enacting new laws that will cost Ontario families and businesses billions of dollars.

Take the Green Energy Act, for example. The Liberal government was in such a panic to rush this particular bill through the House that it neglected to do any due

diligence whatsoever. And you don't have to take just my word for it. Last year, the Auditor General found that under the Green Energy Act, "billions of dollars were committed to renewable energy without fully evaluating the impact, the trade-offs, and the alternatives through a comprehensive business-case analysis."

Do you know what else the Auditor General found? That every green job that's created results in the loss of two to four jobs in other industries.

These problems stem from the Green Energy Act itself. As the Auditor General points out, "the minister essentially had the authority to direct the OPA, which minimized the need for an analysis of different policy options and an assessment of the cost-effectiveness of alternative approaches."

Mr. Speaker, I do more cost-benefit analysis looking at the menu at Swiss Chalet than the government does on significant pieces of legislation like the Green Energy Act. Clearly, the Liberal government didn't weigh the costs and benefits of this act, and now Ontarians have been left with billions of dollars of waste, thousands of outstanding FIT contracts and a green energy sector built on unrealistic and unsustainable expectations.

A thorough cost-benefit assessment should have been conducted before the Green Energy Act was ever tabled, so that opposition parties, businesses, municipalities and the public could have helped troubleshoot some of the potential problems right from the start. Let's just be honest: We know full well that if there's no requirement to assess how new laws will affect Ontarians, the Liberal government won't do it.

But I'm not finished, Mr. Speaker. Let's take a look at another example of Liberal legislation that underwent absolutely no cost-benefit analysis. Three years ago, when the Premier and practically the entire Liberal caucus were planning to impose a needless carbon tax on Ontarians, the Liberal government backtracked and chose to use a much more covert way of introducing carbon pricing in Ontario by laying the foundation for a cap-and-trade scheme.

After signing on to a binational agreement, called the Western Climate Initiative, with several American states, the Liberal government established a cap-and-trade system when it amended the Environmental Protection Act to authorize the "making of regulations relating to emissions trading." It didn't take long for the government to create a new regulation that specifies that certain industries must annually report their emissions to the government if they release 25,000 tonnes or more of greenhouse gases each year.

Just in April, in fact, the environment minister confirmed that the Liberals are forging ahead with their cap-and-trade scheme even after every US state except California pulled out of their carbon pricing plans under the WCI due to concerns that carbon pricing would impede economic growth and kill job creation.

That hasn't stopped Ontario and Quebec from moving forward, though. In fact, Quebec has already begun to fully implement its cap-and-trade scheme, and it plans to

raise \$2.7 billion in new revenue from businesses in the province. Despite the financial gravity and potential economic consequences of this plan, when I asked the finance minister during estimates committee in July if he's ever evaluated the cost of the Liberals' cap-and-trade scheme, he said no. In fact, he wasn't even aware that cap and trade was part of the Liberal government's policy.

I have to be honest: I find it absolutely crazy that the Liberal government would table and pass legislation that would cost Ontario businesses billions of dollars without conducting a proper cost-benefit assessment.

My bill would provide Ontarians with the additional protection against bad government policy. Bill 109 would require that the government assess how its laws would also affect Ontario's competitiveness. Let me tell you, the Liberal government wouldn't have had to go very far to hear from businesses who believe the cap and trade would cripple their profitability and send more jobs overseas.

I know I don't have too much time, but I also want to talk a little about two other important provisions in the bill.

First, Bill 109 would require the government to also assess how new legislation would overlap or conflict with municipal bylaws and federal laws. If you read Don Drummond's report, you'll have seen the part dealing with the legislation and regulatory overlap of the provincial and federal environmental assessment processes, as we all want to protect the environment for our generation and generations to come. If my bill were in effect, we would have caught the duplications between the provincial and federal EA processes before they even happened, and protected our environment in a way that doesn't inhibit economic growth.

Finally, my bill requires that government policy be science-based. For far too long, the Liberal government has pushed science aside to pass ideological legislation that appeases certain interest groups but isn't in the collective interests of Ontarians. If my bill were in effect, this would stop too.

The bottom line is, Ontarians want to know up front what the government has coming down the pike before they get hit with new taxes, regulations and other unintended consequences. That's why I'm calling on all members of this Legislature to take a stand with me today and vote in favour of greater transparency in government decision-making, so Ontarians can have a clear idea of how new government legislation will affect their health, their pocketbook, their businesses and their environment.

I look forward to hearing what the other members of this Legislature have to say.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jonah Schein: First, I want to congratulate the member from Kitchener—Conestoga for his first private member's bill here today.

I will be supporting this bill, and I think that the member is speaking to aspirations of, I would assume, most people in the House, which is that we have good public policy that has proper scrutiny and transparency. I think this is the best element of a Progressive Conservative tradition, where people acknowledge that people want accountability with their tax dollars. We are responsible for that money within this House, and it's our duty to do that, and I think there's nothing at all wrong with that.

I think that, in some ways, it's a matter of how things actually go on in this House as opposed to legislating it, as this bill wants to do. I think that many of the parts of this bill actually already happen here. If you read the preamble of a bill, it already explains the purpose of the legislation. But nevertheless, I think that it's worthy to try to make this place work better and make it more accountable.

I think many new members in this House have real concerns about a lack of transparency here, and about, as the member said, a lack of faith within our communities on how this place works for them, so I think we owe it to ourselves and to our communities to make this place work better.

I do have somewhat of a concern, though. I think what we do see here in this House too often is short-sighted public policy, the kind of public policy that might take into account costs but only short-term costs, and I think we all pay the price for that in the long run. I think what we need to do, when we evaluate a bill, is look at the long-term cost implications. Those are health and environment implications, and ultimately those are dollar implications as well.

When I look around at some of the public policy that's made—sometimes we're told we don't have the resources to invest in public transit. I live in a city, Toronto, that's 20 years behind when it comes to public transit. An investment in public transit would pay for itself year after year. We hear that, whether that's health officials telling us that or the board of trade that says we lose \$6 billion in productivity each year due to gridlock. We know that it will cost something in the short term to invest in something like public transit, but in the long term, we all benefit from that.

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With this bill, I would like to see that we add that element in here, that we look at the long-term costs. There are other regions that are doing this, that are taking in the health impacts of legislation. When we look at something like welfare in this province, which is abysmal, where we expect people—who are out of work due to no fault of their own because they cannot find employment—to live off of \$600 a month, we know that we're paying that back in health costs. We know that people are getting sick. We should know that investing in the first place in our social programs will save us in the long run in terms of health costs. So I do hope that, going forward, when we look at this bill, we'll be trying to

make an effort to look at both the short-term costs and the long-term costs.

I'm going to share the time with my friends over here, but again I want to congratulate the member and express my support for the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the outset, of course, it's a privilege and responsibility to rise to speak on Bill 109, tentatively titled the Transparency in Government Bills Act. I would congratulate and commend my colleague on the opposition bench there, Mr. Harris, MPP for Kitchener—Conestoga, for his presentation of his first private member's bill.

I've had the opportunity to study the bill. I must say that it was a somewhat rapid event, since the letter that was distributed by my colleague was actually longer than the bill itself. Having said that, I would just like to note that the bill actually calls for a lot of additional information, and I'll speak a little bit about that in detail.

I'd also like to commend my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga, because I know that his desire for transparency in government is something that he espoused when he ran for the Liberal nomination in 2007 against one Leanna Pendergast. I know that these are the types of issues that you've espoused for quite some time. And at the outset, as he mentioned himself, I'd also just like to congratulate him on his time well spent at Honeywell—as you'll know, Speaker, the manufacturers of Ontario's smart meters.

In any case, a lot of information that Mr. Harris's bill seeks to unearth, I believe, Speaker, as you'll know and as members of this Legislature will know, is already available through committee and public disclosure processes, as well as, of course, during the legislative debate. I appreciate that the member is a recent acquisition of Queen's Park and may not be entirely familiar with all the various policies and procedures. For example, any member of this Legislature can ask for technical briefing on emerging and certainly important legislation, and I must say that our government, to its credit, has an extraordinary record of being very accommodative to these types of requests.

Peut-être qu'il n'est pas au courant de toutes les politiques et procédures du Parlement. Tout membre peut demander une séance d'information technique sur la législation émergente. Notre gouvernement a un grand record d'être très accommodant à ces demandes.

The bill would effectively create an extra layer of government and red tape. It does not account for the extra staff and resources that would be required for the extra layer of government.

Notre gouvernement est déterminé à la reddition des comptes et à la transparence. Nous avons élargi la portée de la liberté d'information et le gouvernement a déjà démontré un fort engagement envers la transparence et la responsabilité dans les domaines visés par ce projet de loi d'initiative parlementaire.

The member opposite has referred a number of times to various media scrums, media interviews and media availability sessions, that he's had with the press, and I'd like to just quote from some of those. He was asked, for example, directly about this bill by one of the members of the press, I believe from the Toronto Star, "Isn't assessing and analyzing the impact of legislation the opposition's job?" The initial response from the member from Kitchener—Conestoga was, "Absolutely, it is."

Yet here he is asking everyone else to do his research and consultation for him. He has presented us with a bill about costing future bills, but this bill, ironically, is itself uncosted. He's asking the government essentially, it seems, to prepare his arguments for and against the legislation rather than consulting with constituents, interest groups and affected organizations.

I'll be more specific, Speaker. On June 12, 2012, at a media availability at which were present CTV, the Toronto Star and other media, he was asked specifically, "Shouldn't you be analyzing [legislation]? I mean, if the government produced a report" saying that their legislation was great, "what would be the purpose of that?" This is a transcript of the recording, not a direct verbatim printout. But in any case, my colleague opposite said, "In fact, a lot of the government bills—they always do this research, but they're not making it public. So we say it should be mandatory that the information is public, posted online—I mean, instead of filed away in the library downstairs where average, you know, citizens of Ontario don't have regular access to the information." And then the press replied, "Isn't it your job ... to analyze this in committee? And doesn't this all come out at committee—the costs and everything else about the bill? Doesn't the legislation contain most of the information you need to know?" And so on.

Now, it's interesting as well, Speaker, that in my colleague's desire for accountability, of course, one cannot help but reflect a little bit about the accountability displayed by the PC caucus and the PC government over time. For example, the member recently, in a press release of his own in his riding, said, "The Liberals are moving too slowly on the public sector side. They're doing nothing at all to boost the rest of the economy..." Yet that of course was the focus of his particular press release, not this particular bill. But I would draw his attention to openly, publicly available information, that the Liberal government has created something over 120,000 new jobs in 2011. That, by the way, in terms of transparency and accountability, seemed to be a missing statistic from his particular press release.

But let's return specifically to Bill 109, the bill at hand, which, by the way, Speaker, has nothing to do with job creation or health care or education. Now, despite the focus here of this particular bill—as I say, it does not create a single private sector job. It doesn't open a single hospital bed or educate even one student.

So I move now, for example, to some of, let's say, the noble history of accountability in the PC caucus. I quote, Speaker, for example, from the Toronto Star, October

2003: "Outgoing Tories Outright"—and there's an "L" word, Speaker. I dare not use it, dare not name it here, because it's likely unparliamentary. But it's with reference to the \$5.6-billion intransparent, opaque deficit that the Tories left Ontarians with.

In the St. Catharines Standard, more close to home: "Tories Slammed for Leaving \$5.6-Billion Deficit"; in the Ottawa Sun, "Tories Left \$5.6-Billion Deficit: Auditor Uncover 'Shocking' Debt"; in the North Bay Nugget, "Province Faces \$5.6-Billion Deficit," and "It exemplifies a history of mismanagement and misrepresentation" and non-transparent government.

Speaker, that's the Tory experience and demonstration of transparency and accountability. I would suggest respectfully, through you, to the people of Ontario and certainly to my colleagues opposite, that the Liberal government, on the other hand, is not only committed to accountability, but we have continuously improved where the previous governments have failed.

Le projet de loi d'initiative parlementaire obligerait le gouvernement à investir des sommes considérables dans la technologie de nouveaux rapports, de nouvelles ressources, et de créer de lourdes procédures bureaucratiques qui ne seraient pas d'améliorer la transparence et de reddition des comptes existants qui ont déjà été mis en oeuvre. Ce projet de loi sur les coûts pour les autres projets de loi non-financés et reniés.

I'll give you some examples, Speaker, in terms of the accountability and transparency record of this government over the past several years. We've broadened the scope of freedom-of-information legislation. We've brought publicly funded universities, colleges and hospitals under FOI legislation. We've brought the energy sector back into the fold—including Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation—under, again, access to privacy legislation in 2005, and local public utilities back in 2004. The previous PC government removed Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation from the domain of FOI legislation. That is their record of accountability.

1400

Specifically, as I mentioned, this bill is uncoded, which is of course particularly ironic as its very few sentences are regarding costing of other government bills. But this would require the government to invest considerable new funds in reporting technology, resources and bureaucratic processes that would not improve existing transparency and accountability measures that are already in effect. I would submit that this bill likely has little to do in the way of accountability and transparency.

Here's how this place is ideally supposed to work and how members are therefore invited to collect their thoughts, their research, their points with regard to particular legislation and not have the government itself spoon-feed: One has recourse to caucus research, the legislative library, legislative counsel, external agencies, the press, your own constituents, and stakeholders. All of these come together, generally speaking, at committee work. If that itself is not adequate in the opinion of the

opposite members, then they are entitled, as members of Parliament according to parliamentary privilege, to ask the government of the day on emerging legislation to actually provide them with a ministerial briefing, and they can get into as technical detail as possible.

I would suggest that this is simply adding a new layer of bureaucracy to review and analyze proposed legislation, which ultimately is the responsibility of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Le gouvernement libéral a fait preuve d'une volonté de renforcer la responsabilisation et la transparence, tout en créant de bons emplois dans le secteur privé et un climat qui fait de l'Ontario le deuxième emplacement le plus souhaitable en Amérique du Nord pour les investissements. Nous allons continuer à ce tout en protégeant les gains que nous avons faits dans les soins de santé et l'éducation.

Our government has shown not only a willingness to enhance accountability and transparency, but with reference to Bill 109, I think that most, if not all, of these particular measures are already incorporated within the ebb and flow and the cut and thrust of parliamentary procedure.

Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: First, I want to acknowledge and congratulate the member from Kitchener-Conestoga on his first private member's bill. I'm sure it will be the first of many. I see him, on a daily basis, taking serious regard for his constituents, and this whole focus of his bill is to show respect to the taxpayer of Ontario.

I think it's important to also put some of the things in the context of what is actually going on in the Legislature today. There was a point raised today reminding all of us of what Premier McGuinty was elected on: that he will make government business your business. In fact, what he has done is make it more expensive for people to live in Ontario. That's the only thing he has done. He has increased spending by 70%, so we're paying more and getting less. It's not just on your electricity bill; it's on everything the government does. We often refer to it as government by regulation. People can't do so much today, as has been mentioned on the electricity file, as just one example.

I also think it's important, in the context of today, that this morning, the Speaker—and I'm reading the note—ruled, "I am therefore satisfied that a prima facie case of privilege has been established." In fact, you could say that he has accused the Minister of Energy of contempt of the Legislature. In the context of that, that doesn't refer specifically to Bill 109, but in fact, Bill 109 is all about accountability and respect for the Legislature and the process here.

That was about issues that were raised in committee. The Liberal government members in the committee of estimates did everything in their power to shield the minister, to block or form a wall or a barrier to having access to information about the closure of both the

Oakville and Mississauga gas-fired plants. The issue is out there. There's just one example, amongst others—I'm sure some of the other speakers here will speak to it—that would probably be closing in on \$1 billion alone.

The numbers aren't in; they won't give them to us. But \$300 million is one of the numbers; \$190 million is another number and there are cases before the courts, so we won't see—those will come under the Attorney General's ministry engaging law firms to defend the government's position on the mishandling of the energy file completely. What the consumer sees today on their bill are the highest electricity costs in North America, right here in Ontario under Premier McGuinty's watch.

But there are four primary concerns on the bill that are not large but are imposing. It tries to clarify the problem that the legislation of the government is trying to resolve. Also, it requires the costs to implement, and it also outlines or encourages the government to outline who pays, and also and more importantly, how it is measured at the end of the day. How do we measure the success of the bill? That's clearly what accountability is, and it stems back to some of the other legislation that my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga, Mr. Michael Harris—I think we see it every day here, every week here. I think of some that aren't quite as popular. The Clean Water Act is one. The cosmetic pesticide ban is another one. I know this afternoon Mr. Klees will speak about Ornge, I'm sure. The Environmental Protection Act; the Transparency in Government Act, which really overwrote one of the protection acts that we had on transparency ourselves.

But one of the ones that affects my constituents more importantly than any is the Green Energy Act, Bill 150. The moratorium on wind that we suggested during the election—now the federal government has done that. The government is forging ahead, expunging the powers of municipal government to have no input whatsoever, ignoring the environment, ignoring everything and just forging ahead with unaffordable energy.

I'm just going to say a couple more things. The one that really affects me is the slots-at-racetracks program: 60,000 people in rural Ontario are being cut to pieces by this legislation. I commend the member from Kitchener-Conestoga on his effort to bring accountability to this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I do want to commend the member from Kitchener-Conestoga on his attempt to try to bring a bill that would in effect legislate good legislation, and so it's laudable. I'm not sure we can do it, but it's laudable.

There are some goods and some negatives that flow out of this legislation. For example, his suggestion of having or moving towards an evidence-based decision-making process in law is a good one. The problem is the politics side of it. When I look at Mr. Harper at the federal level, he often cites evidence-based decision-making when it suits him, but when it doesn't, he

disregards it. The problem with legislation is that you can use it to justify what you want or not use it when you don't want to do certain things. And the problem with politics is that it often gets in the way of good legislation. That's why I argue that it's difficult to legislate good legislation—because of politics.

An example: Quebec has had a law since 2002, the Public Health Act, requiring that health impact assessments be used to encourage collaboration among departments to maximize the positive health benefits of laws and regulations. However, in 2008 a review of the Quebec health impact assessments concluded that the assessments were largely ignored by governments in power. Do you understand what I'm getting at, member from Kitchener-Conestoga? You could pass a law requiring you to do something, and when the review was done, lo and behold, we realize, "Holy God, we're not abiding by our own laws." And so you can pass a law, but who makes us accountable? It's the citizens of Ontario that ultimately make us accountable to those laws, good or bad. In the end they put an X beside your name, affiliated to that party, and they finally say, "Nah, we don't like you anymore." That's how they do it. You generally have to rely on good citizens to make their wise decisions about bad governments, and they usually get it right. Usually after two terms, they get it right. Sometimes they fail and require three terms to get it right, but they get it right. Rarely does a government do it right for four terms—I dare say, three terms—rarely, unless they're really, really politically smart. But I don't find many politicians in this country that smart, or indeed anywhere in the world, although I used to be a great admirer of Bismarck. I loved the way he would cause crises to solve them and get re-elected each and every time—a very clever man. But not many politicians are that good.

1410

I raise the issues of evidence-based decision-making as sounding solidly good, but again, it depends on the politics of the government. Mr. Harper fired hundreds of good environmental scientists, the very people who would give us evidence-based reports on environmental effects that are taking place in this country and the world. He fired the very people who could collect the evidence. To me, it doesn't make any sense, but that's what he did. That's but one example that comes to mind quickly. The point is, politicians will do whatever they want to, to serve their own agenda.

Some of the failures of the bill, or at least the shortcomings, are that the bill focuses on negative impacts but doesn't talk about the potential benefits of a particular issue. For example, the Conservatives often talk about the economic impacts of the Green Energy Act, or indeed the cap and trade, as negative short-term impacts of that, while they ignore the long-term costs of not taking action, i.e., the health and environmental costs of failing to shift toward a renewable energy grid or the longer term costs of failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While you focus on the short-term economic impacts,

you don't look at the overall long term of not taking action, or the costs of not taking action. Your bill doesn't take that balance into account, as I believe it should.

The bill requires information on economic and financial impacts, but no information on other impacts—social or equity impacts. The member from Etobicoke North quite correctly makes the point that this bill would probably require additional staff—and therefore cost to government, and therefore cost to the public—to be able to do the very things the member from Kitchener-Conestoga speaks about. Some Conservatives say, no, the existing staff could do this. I understand your argument. There are a whole lot of people out there saying that as we cut staff, services are going to be reduced, and a whole lot of citizens say, “I can't get the service I used to be able to get 15, 20 years ago.” The reason for that is that staff have been fired and the current staff that exists is overworked. That's an argument I make. I know the Tories will make theirs, obviously.

There are some positive things in the bill, but I really do believe it has to be balanced out by other arguments. That's why I don't mind this bill going to second reading and to committee debate, because then people like me can make certain arguments, others will make others and you'll have a healthy debate. I'm okay with that.

I do believe that the only way to make politicians accountable is to have informed, politicized—not necessarily in a way that is ideologically connected to a party, but politicized, informed citizenry who can make any political party accountable. An informed citizenry can demand accountability and can demand transparency of any political party in government. That's what we should be working toward: informing the public, making sure they're educated, making sure they're engaged and making sure they make us accountable.

Often my argument against the grade 10 course where you have a half-course on civics and the other half-course on careers is that it's simply not the way to get our young people to be politically informed. If you want an informed student body that become active citizen participants in the affairs of the state, we need to engage young people with more just a half-course in civics. How could they understand politics with a half-course and a half-course in careers? We've got to change that.

And they would be involved if we added to the curriculum not one full course of civics but indeed more, so that they would understand the political impacts of the decisions we make on their lives. Once they understand that, they will make us accountable, and it doesn't matter who's in power. That's what we should work on, is my suggestion to the member on how we bring about greater accountability and transparency in the affairs of the state.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I'm pleased to join in the debate on this important bill brought forward by my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga. It's important at a number of levels. I hear some issues being raised by previous speakers, and I suppose my colleague will agree

as well that the bill in its current form is probably not perfect. That's why we want to see it go to committee, where we can all participate in making it better.

Actually, the member from Trinity-Spadina makes reference to a very important point, and that is that the analysis of a bill should also include what the positive benefits are in the long term, so that we truly do have a full picture of what the long-term benefits and the short-term benefits—and perhaps the costs, short- as well as long-term—are related to any legislation that comes forward.

I would like to focus on a matter that I think is really perhaps at the heart of what my colleague is attempting to achieve through this. I'd like to read from a paper entitled *Transparency in Government Operations*. This is a paper that was put out by the International Monetary Fund, and it speaks specifically to the issue of transparency by government, or the lack thereof. I'd like to read just one paragraph here. And I recommend this document to my colleagues; I think we would all benefit from reading this paper. It says, “A deliberate lack of fiscal transparency is often attributable to a government's attempt to escape public scrutiny of its behaviour—especially in the run-up to elections—to avoid or postpone possible adverse reaction from the electorate and from financial markets, on which it depends for political support and deficit financing, respectively.

“Pressures to engage in non-transparent practices are likely to mount during periods of fiscal stress. Rather than take unpopular corrective action, governments may resort to such practices when facing difficulties in meeting near-term budget targets.”

Speaker, I think that by bringing this bill forward my colleague has made a very important point to this government and to this Legislature, that when dealing with important legislation coming forward, members of the Legislature deserve to know what the implications of that legislation are. The public deserves to know what the cost of that legislation or the cost of that particular policy is going to be. One of the reasons that we have so much cynicism about what happens here and in other Parliaments is because of the lack of transparency and the lack of accountability, and so I think this bill will do much more than just simply give us better legislation and better public policy; I think, at the heart of it, it will restore confidence in policy, in politicians and in the institution of Parliament.

1420

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 109 put forward by my good friend from Kitchener-Conestoga and my seatmate as well, a very energetic new member of the PC caucus. We have 16 of them over here who are very energetic and trying to make changes in this government that's nine years too long in power.

As the PC critic for small business and red tape, I can't tell you how many meetings I've been at with businesses and trade organizations and others, and they've

told me about the levels of regulation that have been imposed by this government over the last nine years without any consideration on existing standards that are already in place.

Just from my conversations with business leaders—and I just had a meeting about an hour ago with members of the Ontario Home Builders' Association in my office upstairs—they say that this may be the single, most useful provision in this bill in that it will eliminate the overlap that currently exists if we can harmonize regulations across levels of government—that includes federal and municipal levels of government too—and end what they like to call “scope creep.” That refers to ministries or agencies that exceed their initial scope of their regulatory authority, and that will drastically reduce the amount of red tape in the province.

I had the chance over the summer as well to meet with small business leaders in 15 different ridings across Ontario, and the message I got was really simple. We need a regulatory regime in the province that makes sense, because the current one is making it increasingly difficult for business—small businesses, home builders, forestry workers—you name it. It's just getting more and more difficult because of the regulation on their backs. It's like a 380,000-pound piano that people and the construction workers are carrying around. That's because there's 380,000 different pieces of provincial regulation on the books here. That doesn't include municipal and federal, and there's a lot of overlap that exists.

The other particularly strong provision in this bill is the detailed summary of the financial costs that new legislation will have on municipalities, individuals, businesses and our books here at Queen's Park. I take issue with what the member from Trinity-Spadina said, that it's going to create more red tape because we're going to have to hire more workers. There's been some 300,000 government workers who have been hired over the McGuinty government tenure, especially in the last few years, and I can tell you that a lot of them aren't doing anything over in their offices right now at the corner of Wellesley and Bay or wherever they might be scattered across the province. We need to put them to work, and we need to get them working on these types of things to ensure that we're not costing businesses money because, at the end of the day, it's these private sector businesses that are out there trying to do their work, trying to add to the economy, trying to create jobs in the province of Ontario, and because government is getting in the way and putting up barriers at every turn, it's impossible for them to do so.

I just want to take a second to mention the member from Etobicoke North as well. Hopefully, he has the time to do his homework and correct his record. I can't correct his record for him, but he should do a little bit of homework and maybe correct his record before the day is done.

I want to go back quickly to talk about the bill. These legislated measures exist in other provinces and jurisdictions around North America, and they have proven

that when you do legislate these kinds of things, there's an overall decrease in the amount of red tape. Again, that's how we can grow businesses and create jobs. We've lost hundreds of thousands over the last nine years because of scope creep in Ontario.

Thank you, Speaker. Congratulations to the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member for Kitchener-Conestoga has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd first like to thank the member for Davenport for his support of the bill. Your comments about assessing the short- and long-term costs are duly noted.

To the member for Etobicoke North, thank you for your comments, but I would rather like to address a few of the things you had mentioned. I'm not sure if you were down at the MPAC Lego party this week and, unfortunately, unable to check your facts, but I in fact ran for the Ontario PC nomination back in 2007 and then again in 2011, and became an MPP—just a point on that.

Back to the bill, though. You talked about how the ministry provides technical information, but this doesn't address my point about accessibility. Not everyone has the ability to come to Toronto for a briefing like we do. That's why I'm calling for the information to be online, so let's take a step into the 21st century.

You also talked about how MPPs should be researching and analyzing government legislation. Well, we do, but you completely missed the point of this bill. In fact, Bill 109 is for Ontarians, not just for myself and the opposition parties. We want all Ontarians to have this information so they can engage in the province's political discourse.

I find the claim about bureaucracy quite interesting, considering that Management Board of Cabinet typically, but not in all cases—especially the ones I have outlined—conducts a thorough financial examination of government bills. So there shouldn't be any extra costs with posting that information online. You would prefer, obviously, to keep Ontarians in the dark, similar to what your energy minister has been trying to do, as was reaffirmed this morning, and was lambasted for doing.

I'd like to thank my colleague from Durham, Mr. Klees from Newmarket-Aurora and my seatmate and astute gent Mr. Todd Smith from Prince Edward-Hastings. Thank you for your time today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll vote on this bill at the end of private members' public business.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government should act to prevent a recurrence of the spending of \$35.6 million paid to 8,700 of 8,900, or 98% of eligible managers and executives in Ontario's public service as a bonus on top of their salaries during a

period of fiscal restraint to avoid worsening Ontario's fiscal crises, through the implementation of an immediate, fair and reasonable across-the-board broader public sector wage freeze, including a freeze on all bonuses paid to all public service employees, including managers and executives, for a period of no less than two years, and that any employee in the broader public service who receives a bonus within the wage and bonus freeze period, as a result of contractual agreements or other reasons shall have an amount equal to said bonus reimbursed to the employer of record from their salary for the entire duration of the wage and bonus freeze.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. McDonnell has moved private member's notice of motion number 26. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. Mr. McDonnell.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Speaker, Ontario is in trouble after nine years of this Liberal government's spending frenzy that has created a record deficit, doubled the debt and raised taxes into the stratosphere. Policies have resulted in three credit downgrades. Ontario, which was once the economic envy of Canada and North America, is now no longer competitive as a destination for investment and new business growth.

The McGuinty reign of broken promises, bad economic policies and the return of favour-for-contribution legislation has resulted in the highest power rates, the highest income taxes and the highest property taxes in North America; and a debt for our children and grandchildren that is twice the per capita debt of California, which many say is bankrupt, and, as warned by their economist Don Drummond, is on the way to three times that, or \$30,000 for every man, woman and child in this province. Truly strong action is required to save our future and right the mess this government has created.

Tim Hudak and the PC caucus have repeatedly called upon the McGuinty Liberals to implement an integrated and comprehensive plan to rein in reckless overspending and kick-start the economy to create private jobs. Today, I table a motion requesting the McGuinty government to immediately act to legislate a mandatory two-year public sector wage freeze, saving up to \$2 billion annually. It's the most effective thing this government can do right now to start Ontario back on the road to recovery.

With over 4,000 collective agreements, it is the only sensible plan of action this government can take. The current action of dealing with public service contracts one by one gives raises to some while getting tough with others. It's not practical, it's not smart, it's not fair and it doesn't make sense.

1430

Every day, private sector businesses are sacrificing just to stay afloat, with many of them not making it through the worst recession since the Great Depression. And those that are still here must navigate through minefields of the McGuinty government's failed policies on high energy costs, high taxes and a sea of red tape: barriers to prosperity. Adding to their woes, the world's largest economies are continuing to slow. We must take

bold steps to protect our economy and the social programs that we hold so dearly.

A public sector freeze will allow this government to direct our scarce resources to key strategic areas that will help Ontario weather the economic uncertainty. The public sector has escaped the downturn relatively unscathed and enjoyed healthy increases not seen by the private sector. It must be part of the solution or face the same consequences as businesses continue to fail and government revenues continue to plummet.

Let's remember that more than 55% of the massive tax increases instituted by this McGuinty government—the largest increases in Ontario's proud history—have not gone to new transit systems, new roads, new hospitals, new long-term beds or any other badly needed infrastructure. They've not gone to economic development or health care or to the municipalities that desperately need help. They're not even part of the dollars we've seen wasted on scandals like eHealth, the green energy projects, Ornge or the two cancelled power plants in Mississauga and Oakville—we saw today how this government is still trying to refuse to give these documents back to the people of Ontario so they can see just how much was spent in these seat-saving decisions—or any other government waste that the McGuinty Liberals are now famous for. No, this 55% in tax increases has gone to public service wages. So the public sector needs to be part of the solution.

Under our plan, a PC government would take immediate and fair action in stopping the picking of winners and losers. There would be no exceptions. Without this legislation, we continue to see wage increases and bonuses handed out to the so-called winners, such as the CUPE power workers, who recently received almost a 9% increase. Then there's the 98%, or 8,700, of government bureaucrats who got bonuses of up to 14% of their salaries. Just the bonuses, which added up to \$35.6 million, would pay for over 17,000 MRIs in a health care system where people are waiting up to eight months for such tests.

Truly, we see a lack of commitment by this McGuinty government. Then we see the Liberal government pick on the teachers and the college professors with a newfound conviction. Coincidentally, it was just in time for the recent by-elections, when they wanted to change the page and start to look tough. It's not fair and it's not right. As we must all share in the solution, the Liberals refuse to stand up to union bosses who helped bankroll their re-election campaigns using compulsory union dues.

Dalton McGuinty claimed there was a wage freeze in the March budget, but clearly we see that there is no such thing, as he continues to give out increases ad hoc.

These are bold and controversial ideas, but under the status quo, 600,000 Ontarians are unemployed. We've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs in nine years while adding 300,000 bureaucratic government jobs. Last month we lost another 57,000 net new jobs, and the Premier still has no plan. Our unemployment rate has been higher than the national average for almost six

years. It's time for a new path forward with new and bold ideas to make Ontario competitive and a target for new and growing businesses once again, just like we used to be. We need a growing economy across Ontario to drive local prosperity, private sector job creation and growth.

The Auditor General showed how this Premier's pet green energy projects and outrageous subsidies are driving up the cost of energy for every Ontario family, including the 600,000 unemployed, who can least afford it, and including those on social assistance, who see their social payments evaporate into higher and higher energy costs, costs that they have no choice but to pay.

Following that, the government's hand-picked economist, Don Drummond, delivered the final blow to the Liberal delusion of an unlimited spending bonanza. The numbers spell out the depth of the trouble that this government has dug this province into. We're on the way to a \$30-billion deficit, \$411 billion in debt, and the Liberals have no plan to change the course.

If you can envision water going down the drain, it goes around in circles. Around and around it goes until it disappears in a black hole. That's what's happening to our tax dollars. And this is their position, which can be summarized as, "Steady as she goes."

Let's put it into perspective. This government is borrowing today at such a rate that in the time it takes the Premier to stand up in question period and claim that we're on the right track, an Ontarian has borrowed the equivalent of his average gross yearly salary or, to put it another way, \$1.8 million an hour. When we reach that \$411-billion cumulative debt, every man, woman and child in this province will owe our creditors \$30,000. That tally does not include the unfunded liabilities that they've also driven up, whether it be the WSIB, that is now at \$19.7 billion, or the public service pensions that he's refused to address, the huge liabilities that—someday, and not too long in the future, the pensioners of this province are going to find out that the money is gone, and at 71 or older, I don't think they want to go back to work, but that would be their option.

When Moody's downgraded Ontario's credit rating, ridiculing this government's claims of good fiscal stewardship, one of their cited concerns was weak metrics. In layman's terms, this government doesn't know what it should measure or how it should measure it. Even if it does so, the measurements are not credible. In fact, this Minister of Finance welcomed the downgrade as a negotiating tool, as proof of the seriousness of Ontario's financial predicament, something that this McGuinty government adamantly denied just a few months before, during the general election. But I hope, for the sake of Ontario, that it wasn't because he didn't know.

We have an example of this sloppiness in the Auditor General's report on the green energy boondoggle. When the government did one of its rare cost-benefit assessments before rushing headlong into a policy bandwagon, the auditor dismissed every single one as too optimistic or built on assumptions that did not correspond to common sense.

On jobs, the government is buying time because it hasn't got a clue about job creation. They focused so long on killing jobs with their ill-thought-out policies, they've forgotten the real purpose of government.

But, Speaker, it shouldn't be this way. We are a province with immense resources in our ground, in our water and, most importantly, in our people, a qualified, industrious workforce that is the envy of the world. All they are expecting and demanding is a government that makes sound decisions based on the economic realities of the current global situation.

I ask this House to do the right thing, do what's right for the people of Ontario: Put the province and them first and support my resolution.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to say from the outset that I like the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, but I disagree with him in the way that he's trying to achieve the savings. I disagree with him in the way his party is trying to achieve these savings.

1440

I also want to correct him on one particular matter, because the Liberals, through Bill 115, have done exactly what you want them to do, and when you say they refuse to go after the union bosses, they did with Bill 115. Give them some credit, for God's sake. It's just not fair that they should finally do something that you admire, and then you say they're not going after the unions.

I really wanted to do the Liberals some justice and be fair to them when they do what Tories normally love to do, and that is to whack unions and union members and union leaders, who they call bosses. So God bless; you finally did what you've been wanting to do in a hurry for a long, long time: trying to achieve the balance between the right and the left. I understand.

My criticism of your party was that you had such a love-love relationship with the teachers, the teacher unions, and then you just gave it all away. You terminated that love affair when it was going so well for so long. It could have gone on, in my view, for a longer period of time, if you had but held on a little longer, held on to that love that you had. But when you decided to go after the unions—oh, my God.

And you noticed what happened in Kitchener-Waterloo. I know some of you are sad, sunken a little—politically, morally. I know that most of you walk with a Linus blanket—you know Linus with the blanket? I can see most of you guys dragging your heels in this Legislature, a bit despondent, unhappy—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Except the troopers, of course, like the member from Ottawa Centre, who's unflappable. He thinks he's going to win the election, no problemo, no matter how hard they've gone after the teachers and unions, but he's unflappable. God bless, member from Ottawa Centre.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Are you off topic now?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, I'm on topic. I was just trying to make the point that he's being unfair to the Liberals because he says that you guys refused to go after the union bosses, and I pointed out that you have done so with Bill 115.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Certainly the NDP did with the social contract.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But I would have thought that the Minister of the Environment, who has been here longer than I, would have been able to learn the lessons of so many errors that other governments have made, and clearly, I think you have; I don't know about the others, however, in terms of learning the lessons of.

So that was one correction that I wanted to make. I didn't want to be too wayward, as you might imagine. But that was one.

The other is that the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry accuses the Liberals of being in a spending frenzy. I don't know about that. And I don't want to be too unfair, but where fairness is due—and that's where they're much closer to the Tories on this one—they have been cutting corporate taxes as well. God bless. Because I think they really want to be as close as they possibly can to the Conservatives. So they've done that.

If they have been in some frenzied activity of sorts, it's in their desire to cut corporate taxes willy-nilly, and they've done that as well as you guys. They're just as good; I can guarantee that. With that, billions of dollars have disappeared from the provincial coffers that would have allowed them, in some measured way, to keep tuition fees down that are the highest in the land. Tuition fees are the highest in the land. To be in a regular program in the humanities costs \$6,300 in tuition fees—

Mr. Jim McDonell: What's the cost in engineering?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Engineering, way up.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Is it \$8,000 or \$9,000?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: At least. To be a doctor or a lawyer costs \$20,000 in tuition fees alone—alone, I say.

And the Liberals think it's okay, because they had the advice of Premier Bob Rae on this, who did a study for the Liberals, who said, "Nah. Students gotta pay more." God bless. Students gotta pay more. Okay, then. They are. Each and every year, for the last eight years, they've been paying 5% more, whacking men and women in universities and colleges with fees they cannot afford.

So when you say they have been spending in a frenzied manner, I don't know about that. I think they've been supporting corporations in a big, big, frenzied way, and with that, they've taken so much of the supports that our young men and women desperately need—and not to talk of the seniors, who are doing so badly, with 60% of them facing poverty levels, and most of those are women.

What are we doing about that? We've introduced a renovation tax credit that allows the one-percenters to get a little tax credit for any expenditures made up to—\$10,000, is it, or \$15,000? That's how we help our seniors. That's the Liberal way.

I just wanted to make some corrections by way of some of the comments you've made. With respect to

your motion, the NDP, through our member from Timmins—James Bay, introduced a bill last week which passed on second reading. The idea was that we wanted to deal with the bonuses that the Tories introduced a long time ago. God bless. They might have had the good intention to honour people in management who were actually excelling in their field. But I don't believe the intent of most of the Tories who were there at the time was that we should give bonuses to every manager each and every year. Surely not every manager excels to the tune of 3.3%, 3.5% or 3.6% salary increases, literally on a yearly basis. Something is not right with that. Surely Tories never intended for bonuses to be given to 98% of management in the civil service.

We recognize that some people do great work, and in that regard, some bonuses are right, fair and justifiable. But when it becomes an underhanded way of giving salary increases to everyone who's a manager, New Democrats believe that that is wrong, that it's not fair or right to so many other workers who work hard in the civil service.

We introduced a bill that we felt was the right approach to how we deal with bonuses. But a legislated, across-the-board, broader public sector wage freeze, as proposed in the motion, would, in our minds, be found clearly to be unconstitutional and would face a legal challenge. My sense is that the Tories don't mind a legal challenge, because then they could go and say to the public, "You see what's wrong with the court system? It's these judges that are appointed by Liberals and the like, that simply will not do the correct Conservative thing." That's what I suspect they would do. They would accept a legal challenge, because then they could go to their visceral-minded people who would say, "Yeah, these courts. We've got to get rid of these courts, because they're not doing the right thing."

I don't know. I tend to think courts are, generally speaking, very good in the way they make decisions, and they tend to be, in my mind, very fair, generally speaking. I think if you had a broader public sector wage freeze in the way that they propose, it would face a court challenge. When you propose to eliminate bonuses in existing employment contracts, that too is challengeable in the courts, and you would be taken to court. I know you don't care about that, but we think it's just the wrong way to do it.

That's why we proposed a well-thought-out, we think, reasonable private member's bill that would respect existing employment contracts but eliminate bonuses in all renewed or altered public sector management employment relationships. That's the way to do it.

That has gone to a legislative committee. Once we set up our committees, we hope that the government and the official opposition will work with us to make sure that that bill gets passed.

1450

It achieves, in my mind, what many are seeking: fairness in the public sector, fairness at a time when we know we are dealing with some financial difficulties, but

we're doing it respectfully and in a way that is manageable, in a way that allows for greater support within the public sector workforce and within the general public as well.

We have to be careful here. We have to do this right, and doing it right means we have to go to the people who have a little more money, as we did with our proposal, to ask those who earn over \$500,000 to pay a little more. We know that some of them will try to avoid the tax; we know that. But that is the fair way to go, because when you tax people who have \$500,000, they still have a whole lot of money left over to go and spend, and that's where we have to get that money. From people who get \$20,000, it will not affect, overall, their spending desires.

You don't want to go after the little guy. The little guy needs each and every penny to pay the mortgage and pay rent. If we want them to spend, which is what capitalism is all about, because that consumerism contributes 60% to 70% of our overall economy—if we want them to spend, we just can't go after everyone willy-nilly; not just because it's unconstitutional, but because in some sectors, if we take away that little they have, it would affect our economies in ways that you can't imagine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very happy to get up to speak in opposition to ballot item number 55 regarding performance pay for management.

I think it's important to provide a little historical context in terms of what has happened in government, first, under the PC leadership—and I'm not here to defend their policies; that's their job. But we should really examine what has historically happened and what the record is, quite frankly, on pay for performance.

Pay for performance has been in place in the Ontario public service since the PCs created that in 1996. They implemented that for 2,000 senior managers, and then they went on to expand it for all Ontario public service managers in 2001-02, for 8,900 managers. This is when the Leader of the Opposition, Tim Hudak, was at the cabinet table. At that time, what was going on in government? The PCs were paying these bonuses and rewarding managers for closing 28 hospitals, firing 6,200 nurses, closing 5,000 hospital beds and losing six million school days.

The emergency rooms were shutting their doors to ambulances—even, in one case I know, sending a pregnant woman to deliver her baby in Buffalo.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Oh, my goodness.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Horrible. On the other hand, since the Liberals have been in government, when we have judiciously used pay for performance, it's to reward managers to do good things for the people of Ontario, such as building 23 new hospitals, hiring 11,000 nurses, building almost 600 new schools, implementing full-day kindergarten and creating—and this is very important, Speaker—121,300 new jobs in 2011.

The PCs are outraged, even though they implemented the program in the first place and expanded it. That's just a little historical context.

Moving on to the third party, I would like to quote the leader of the third party, who said, on August 30, 2012, "In tough times, everyone needs to do their share. We will completely eliminate performance pay"—not freeze—"and bonus.... This is about fairness and transparency."

The NDP has introduced a bill similar to what we're talking about from the PCs today, similar to ballot item number 56. We've been accused of doing things to win by-elections, but I think the timing of the NDP bill clearly coincided with the timing of the Kitchener-Waterloo by-election. So I just offer that up.

We already know that the Premier and the Deputy Premier, the Minister of Finance, and our side in government have already committed to reviewing pay-for-performance programs. The NDP wanted to cancel—not freeze, I believe; cancel completely—bonuses for OPS managers, the hard-working men and women who deliver our services and things that matter to Ontarians: health care, education, environment and so on. Yet the NDP opposed freezes on teachers' sick days. Which is it, Speaker?

I'm left confused when I look at the record of the PCs.

In terms of our position, the government has a more balanced approach; it always has. We've extended the existing freeze of salaries for MPPs from one to five years, which I think resonates very well with everyone in Ontario. We froze compensation structures for non-bargaining political and Legislative Assembly staff for two years, and froze compensation structures for broader public sector and Ontario public service employees for two years for non-bargaining employees.

Ontario public service managers do not get regular merit or cost-of-living increases, so it's important, when we look at pay for performance, to look at it in that context. It's not automatic. It's based on performance and ensures commitments are met. Only eligible managers will receive performance awards for 2010-11. We've reduced the total cost of pay for performance by 30%, saving \$34 million since the PC government managed this program in, most recently—sorry. Savings have been \$34 million since 2008-09.

We're balancing cost reductions while—and this is very important; I don't hear the opposition talking about this—attracting and retaining employees in government to lead our complex programs and deliver those services to the public.

It's important to note that there's no additional money in the budget for pay for performance. All the ministries are expected to continue to live within their means.

I hope I've clarified some of the historical context in terms of the PCs, the confusion I'm hearing from the NDP, and, I think, our very solid and balanced track record on this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My colleague from Don Valley East and I were having a good conversation on a matter that I raised earlier in this House today on behalf of a

family from my constituency, and I want to publicly thank the member from Don Valley East for his graciousness and just all-around class. Thank you very much.

It is a pleasure to rise and to debate and support my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. As you know, his riding is adjacent to mine. We share a boundary, we share a community, and I'm really proud to support him. I think he's been a tremendous member since coming to this assembly.

Of course, I want to reiterate what we have all been talking about in this House for the past number of weeks, which is the need for us to have some fiscal restraint here at a time of a very difficult economic nature.

I am supporting this legislated, across-the-board wage freeze, and it's no surprise to you, Speaker. Our leader, Tim Hudak, has been very clear over the past year that that's required, and he met with Dalton McGuinty, the Ontario Premier, last November to discuss this.

We know, for example, that our colleague Jeffrey Yurek put forward legislation calling for an across-the-board broader public sector wage freeze. That failed at the time. But we were heartened to know that the Ontario Liberal government was actually starting to think the same way we were thinking when they brought in Bill 115 to talk about a legislated wage freeze. Although it was a partial measure—we still know we need to deal with the broader public sector as a whole—we felt that that was a step in the right direction.

Now, you know, Speaker, we did support that bill earlier this week, and I thought I would provide a small update to the assembly on some of the feedback that I've been receiving. In fact, I received from a union leader today a Twitter that I was a puppy killer because I supported Bill 115. I think we know that when you talk about issues of wage freezes with the broader public sector, rhetoric and some very colourful and inventive language can be used toward members who advocate for fiscal restraint.

I want to congratulate my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for having the courage to put this idea forward because he will probably be on the receiving end of some of those same insults from people.

1500

Look, I won't take too much time of the assembly's time, only to say this: With Bill 115, we made some progress with one very small sector in the broader public sector. The challenge we have before us is that there are about 4,000 more collective agreements coming to pass. That means we can't continue to do this as a one-off or piecemeal arrangement anymore; we need a comprehensive plan that applies equally across the board to all of the broader public service. That is what this motion is about, and that is what this member is talking about.

We are going to continue to pursue this avenue. We believe it is the right way to go, and we feel the only way to actually achieve what the government is now suggesting needs to be done is to bring forward legislation that puts this in place once and for all. I encourage members to support this legislation in good faith. This

member has put forward this motion, continuing on the work of Bill 115 and others.

I must say to those in the public who want to intimidate members of the government and the official opposition for supporting Bill 115, you're not going to intimidate me, and I don't think you're going to intimidate anybody else. That kind of language is not to be used in the public against public officials who are doing the right thing. I was quite shocked at some of the language that has been directed at myself and my colleagues.

I think that we have to rise to the occasion, be there for that challenge and make sure that we have public services that are viable well into the future. The only way to do that is to curb our costs. This is a great way to do it. Congratulations, Jim McDonnell.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to rise and to have an opportunity to speak to this motion. As my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East said, there is some complexity here. It's interesting. Back in 1996, this was initiated by a former government, the Tories, and then it was fully implemented in the year 2001. Currently, about 98% of all employees—the managers—are participating in this particular process. So it is complex. When you really look at that, it actually is base pay. It is pay that has been separated into base pay and incentive pay.

The Premier was very clear that this needs to be addressed. I think we have been very steadfast in our approach. First of all, we brought out a budget that was a tough budget, that actually put forward an agenda that we would have to accomplish in order to bring down that deficit by 2017. Interestingly enough, I thought maybe if this was such an issue, it should have been proposed as an amendment within that budget, but I don't believe either party ever did that. However, having said that, I think the spirit is here that we all recognize there's a challenge ahead of us, and we need to deal with something that's very complex.

But in doing so, I think we also need to recognize that what has been proposed earlier by the member, I think from Timmins–North Bay, Mr. Bisson, was actually a bill that didn't address the issue in its entirety. In fact, it left out the base pay, which would be quite problematic. Then as we look at what the motion is saying, it's virtually the same as well in that it doesn't really get into the details. That's why I'm saying it really is the spirit of moving forward on how we deal with a very complex problem. We said that we would address that issue.

As I said, we started out in 1996. It was extended in 2001. It is a combination of the salary and the base pay, and it is something that we need to have an overall review of. But I think also you need to remember that we've done, I believe my colleague said, some 30% reduction in this as well.

In fairness, it is confusing when I have the member from Trinity stand up and speak to the complexity but I

have the leader of the third party say, "We'll just eliminate it entirely." The same, I must admit, is a little confusing on the Progressive Conservative side, because in their platform of 2011, it actually said that they would have performance pay as part of their platform. So it is confusing.

What we have said all along is that we need to review this. The Premier asked the minister to do this. The minister has that review under way.

We all recognize in this House that there's a challenge. People must be and should be treated fairly, equitably and in an open and transparent fashion so that we can solve a problem that's been going on for a number of years. I'm going to say it was put in place with the best of intentions by a previous party, but we now know it isn't working. So how do we do this so that we recognize and respect those managers for the work that they do?

We need those folks. Government is made up of both the political side and the bureaucratic side. They're the folks that help us implement the policies we've put forward, and we work together as a team. So it's particularly important that we respect and are respectful of the issues that they bring forward, and they certainly will be very much, I'm sure, a part of this review.

When we look at the whole issue around the application of the bonuses and its perspective, we know it's far, it's broad and it's wide, and that it has so many different perspectives to it that we need to give this a full, comprehensive and timely review.

It's one thing to just sort of snap your fingers and say, "Well, we'll just do this and freeze everything, and the world will be perfect." It doesn't work that way. We are talking about people's livelihoods. We're talking about people themselves—

Interjection: Compensation.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: We're talking about compensation. We're talking about respectfulness of the process. So we need to be able to do this in a thoughtful, comprehensive, thorough and respectful way so that we end up with a solution that is not problematic, that in fact is a solution that we can build consensus with our partners on. I think this is particularly important these days.

People throw around \$30 billion. The fact of the matter is that we have a very significant deficit. We were in a worldwide recession. The world is not out of that recession. If you read the papers, you know how tenuous it is and how closely we are entwined with the United States and its economy, because they are our greatest trading partner. So we need to be really mindful of the work that we're doing to ensure that, as we move forward, we eliminate that deficit so that it's not here for our children. But at the same time, we must do it, Mr. Speaker, in a way that is not thoughtless. It must be done so that we protect the public services we believe in—health and education—and at the same time respect the people who deliver those programs.

These are difficult times in terms of making some very difficult decisions. But it's our responsibility as members

of this assembly to work together to find ways and means to be able to do this. So I think that, in spirit, we're all there. Where the difference is in implementation and how we go about it. So I suggest that, in spirit, we can agree, but we need to allow the Minister of Finance to be able to do his work, to do it comprehensively, thoroughly, and in such a way that we come back with a solution that is livable by all.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this particular motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, it's no secret we continue to press for an across-the-board wage freeze for the broader public sector. Given that we're staring down the barrel of a \$411.4-billion debt, we're obviously asking the public sector to take a pass on bonuses. The last thing that the taxpayer would have wanted to see is a \$35.6-million payout to 98% of the managers and executives in the Ontario public service. There's 8,900 of them; 8,700 received a merit pay bonus. During these times, that's a bit of a slap in the face to the taxpayer, hence the motion from the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry calling for an immediate but fair across-the-board wage freeze for the next two years, and that includes bonuses as well.

But having said that, it is important to understand the value of work done by our executives, the value of pay-for-performance, concepts that were inculcated in the legislation, the Excellent Care for All Act. All three parties voted for that. That's understandable. Nobody favours mediocrity, let alone rewarding mediocrity.

1510

Down in my area, our local hospitals—Norfolk General, Tillsonburg, Brantford General, West Haldimand and War Memorial—are continually under pressure. They do a good job, by and large. They do balance their budgets.

I had a meeting recently with a board rep from West Haldimand. Again, we discussed the fact that one size does not fit all. The smaller hospitals don't have the wiggle room as far as finding savings within administration.

We discussed the fact that over the last two years, hospitals have seen seven major changes to their executive compensation programs. The OHA, the Ontario Hospital Association, laid out a list. Time permitting, I'll run through this quickly:

- (1) freeze on all non-unionized compensation structures—that was in Bill 16;
- (2) legislated introduction of pay for performance—as I mentioned, the Excellent Care for All Act;
- (3) the 2011 budget—a mandatory two-year 10% decrease in executive office expenses;
- (4) elimination of perquisites—I think that's the long term for perks—through the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act;
- (5) extension of the wage freeze on senior executives for two additional years—that was in the original 2012 budget;

(6) introduction by the government of a long-term hard cap on the total amount available for pay for performance within an organization.

Speaker, these were amendments to the 2012 budget. And the last major change:

(7) extension of the wage freeze until a minimum of 2017-18.

I just wanted to put that out there for the information of members present.

I understand that at our small West Haldimand hospital—I don't know whether they refer to it as a bonus—they hold back 10% of executive salaries. Depending on the budget, depending on wiggle room, as I indicated earlier, that 10% is paid out. I guess there's a bit of an argument whether that's a bonus or not. I can't speak for administration at the hospital.

One thing I can address: People in my area understand the meaning of restraint. Government austerity, economic austerity, is not something to be sniffed at. They understand working within their means and essentially operating on a lean budget. We're rural people. People work hard for what they have, and the last thing they'd do is take any measure that would sacrifice economic activity in the future or sacrifice their children's future for a present, short-term gain.

There is a place for incentive pay within the public sector—I think everyone in this Legislature agrees with that—but not when you're staring down the barrel of a \$411.4-billion debt. For that reason alone, I support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon in support of my eastern Ontario PC colleague, the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Mr. McDonell.

We had the opportunity to spend quite a lot of time together last fall. I have to tell you that it's bold action like he's proposing in his excellent motion that has earned him the resounding support of his constituents. He certainly puts the people of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry first.

We come from eastern Ontario, a part of this province where people really don't want to hear you talk about solving a problem. They want to make sure you're actually doing something about it. I think this motion is taking real action to turn Ontario away from a \$30-billion deficit that we're rushing toward under the McGuinty government. The reason we're headed there is because this government simply refuses to make tough decisions like implementing an across-the-board public sector wage freeze. I know the members opposite will say that the Premier and the finance minister are talking about it. Quite frankly, it's too late for talk.

Our leader, Tim Hudak, met with the Premier last fall, and one of the items he said that our party would co-operate on was a wage freeze for all public employees. The Premier rejected that idea; in fact, he actually mocked that idea.

What has happened since then? For starters, we're over halfway through a year in which we could have saved \$2 billion had it been implemented on January 1. That's over \$1 billion worth of savings that they've squandered already. What's worse: We learned that 98% of public sector managers got a bonus, and today the Globe and Mail reports that pay increases for the public sector averaged 1.7% in the second quarter of this year alone. Those are just a couple of examples.

I know that the member has worked very hard on this motion, and I know that we're going to get—at least I feel we're going to get—broad support this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, you've got two minutes for a response.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the speakers to my bill. My colleague from Trinity-Spadina, when he talked about Bill 115—the issue with that is that we're picking winners and losers. Why are we so tough on them, one might wonder, when they were so much a big part of this government's election platform but turning around and the power workers—or the bonuses? They talk about pay for performance, and I'm a believer in that as well, but when you're talking about 98%, that's not pay for performance; that's just another way of hiding money.

It was interesting when he talked about the Charlie Brown fiscal policy. I hope that he wasn't talking about his own policy, but it's just interesting to hear that. But he did mention the corporate taxes. Big business or small business is easy to attack, but really, it's all a matter of being competitive. When you add up the taxes, you add up the hydro, you add up the property taxes, that's what we're talking about. We're not talking about letting somebody off with a break they don't deserve.

I want to thank the member from Pickering-Scarborough East and her discussion with the 97 new hospitals, but I just bring back—if you look at the money wasted on eHealth, \$2 billion, that's six new hospitals. If you look at Ormge, there are another two hospitals. The power plants we're talking about—they've gone so far to make sure we can't find out the details—we're probably talking about another six hospitals. And that's without raising taxes. If you add some of the others, the \$1 billion this year that we wasted by delaying this bill, there are another three hospitals.

I also wanted to thank the members from Nepean-Carleton, Haldimand-Norfolk and Leeds-Grenville. They're colleagues of mine who have been a big help, and I look up to them in the work they've done with me in helping me out.

I didn't want to leave off my colleague from Etobicoke Centre in the spirit of working together. I think that's what we want to do: be working together and coming out with something that the people of Ontario are expecting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll take the vote on the motion at the end of regular business.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE
DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR
DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES
PRIS EN CHARGE

Mrs. Piruzza moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 90, An Act to proclaim Children and Youth in Care Day / Projet de loi 90, Loi proclamant le Jour des enfants et des jeunes pris en charge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Speaker.

I'd like to start off by saying what a privilege it is to stand before the House this afternoon for the over 8,000 children and youth living under the care of the crown and of children's aid societies in Ontario and for those who walked in their footsteps before them.

As my colleagues on both sides of this House will recall, on November 18 and 25 of last year, young people in and from care held their own public hearings here at Queen's Park—a first at any provincial Legislature in Canada. These hearings, titled the Youth Leaving Care hearings, were attended by over 300 people on the first day and by over 500 people on the second. As my colleagues in this House who were present for the hearings can attest, the hearings were often tough to listen to at times as youth in and from care shared stories and songs about their experiences growing up as wards in the province.

The hearings team even came up with youth-friendly ways to submit their submissions, such as by audio, video, art and poetry—which was truly inspiring. This outstanding team effort brought in all together a total of 183 submissions from across the province. The submissions were reviewed and organized into six broader themes to form a report. That was not an easy task for the team.

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Speaker, true to the authenticity that characterized the hearings, a report titled *My Real Life Book* was written by the youth hearings team. The team was supported by the provincial advocate's office and the report was tabled here, in the Ontario Legislature, to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins, on May 14 of this year.

I read the report from cover to cover, and while I will admit it was hard to read at times, I strongly urge my colleagues on both sides of this House to do the same. The bravery and thought put into this report is nothing short of remarkable, and I commend the youth hearings team for their hard work. As a mom, these stories truly struck me and tugged at my heartstrings.

Speaker, the *My Real Life Book* report, which is meant to resemble life books which are created and given to children and youth to help them know their stories and to mark significant events in their lives, is uniquely

organized into six themes, as mentioned, which are represented by quotes that were commonly characterized throughout the hearings. These themes include "We are vulnerable," "We are isolated," "We are left out of our lives," "No one is really there for us," "Care is unpredictable" and "Care ends and we struggle."

As part of the recommendations tabled in the report, I'm pleased to point out to this House that Minister Hoskins immediately put into action the number one recommendation: the creation of a working group made up of youth with experience living in care, along with partners from across the province, with the direction of determining how best to ensure a stronger voice for the youth themselves as we move forward with improvements to the child welfare system.

Speaker, it's my understanding that the 15-person working group, which includes eight youth members, who provide expertise, and seven members with strong knowledge of the needs of children and youth, has met three times already since the report was tabled and will continue to meet twice per month from September through November of this year.

Another important recommendation that came out of the report was to declare Children and Youth in Care Day in the province of Ontario, which is what this bill, Bill 90, does. By declaring May 14 of each year as Children and Youth in Care Day in the province of Ontario, we would move one step further towards helping raise awareness, reduce stigma and recognize children and youth in care. As the report points out, it would also help keep the issues affecting the lives of children and youth in care in the public spotlight and provide for regular updates on the action plan for fundamental change.

Let me share with my colleagues what Bill Bevan, CEO of the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society, has to say about this bill:

"We are pleased to see a day specifically dedicated to youth in care and look forward to seeing that the action plan for fundamental change is a government priority...that this plan reflects what youth are saying...they need to not only survive...but thrive.

"We have heard from our youth, and they are particularly concerned with having to age out of care at 21 years before they are ready. We want to continue to parent them but require the government's support. If Bill 90 is enacted, we are committed to ensuring that the voices of our youth, locally and provincially, continue to be heard and guide the necessary changes needed to support them and their growth and success as young adults."

I've gotten to know Mr. Bevan well over the years, in my current role as MPP for Windsor West as well as during my time as executive director of employment and social services with the city of Windsor. Mr. Bevan and his team at the Windsor-Essex CAS have been true champions for the well-being of children and youth under care in the Windsor-Essex region. I thank them for all their support, and I hope that all my colleagues in this House will do the same.

Speaker, as elected officials in this House, we all owe the utmost respect and support to these children and youth to ensure they reach their full potential. We know that youth in care are at a disadvantage when it comes to successfully transitioning to adulthood in terms of acquiring higher education, employment and emotional support. I'm proud that our government has taken a number of steps to address this, and let me share with this House just some of the steps we have taken to date.

We're now allowing for 16- or 17-year-olds who have left care to return to a CAS and be eligible for financial and other supports until the age of 21. Children's aid societies are continuing to provide supports to youth, both emotionally and financially, from ages 18 to 21, through the extended care and maintenance program, as they make their transition to adulthood. We're providing a range of supports to encourage more youth in and leaving care to pursue and complete post-secondary studies, including grants for tuition, reimbursements for application fees, champion teams and OSAP exemptions. We've increased access to educational, social, cultural and recreational opportunities and savings when they leave care through the Ontario child benefit equivalent. We're introducing RESPs for the children and youth in care to support planning for the pursuit of post-secondary education, and we're helping more kids to be adopted and find permanent homes.

Speaker, we know that because of the work that has been done, fewer kids are coming into care, and more kids are being placed in permanent homes because of legislative and policy changes that have been made in the last few years. But we also know there is still more to be done. I hope that by proclaiming May 14 of each year as Children and Youth in Care Day, we will continue to help raise awareness and keep issues that affect their lives in the public spotlight, as this bill is designed to do.

When I first introduced Bill 90, I had the opportunity of presenting it back in Windsor. I was at the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society. There are many examples of the success of our system, but unfortunately, there are also examples of the limitations of our system. I met many youth who either directly or indirectly took part in the hearings, showing great strength and courage in coming forward to tell their stories and share their experiences, their memories, their achievements and their hopes for the future. Speaker, I also met adults who grew up in the system and are now community leaders.

I was taken aback by the excitement and thankfulness of those who I met to know that we're listening, that we seriously consider the recommendations of the hearings. We cannot underestimate the importance of providing our children and youth in care with recognition, of letting them know that we are listening when they feel all too often not listened to.

As I begin to wrap up my speech, I wanted to share with my colleagues in this House about *Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope*, a book written by Covenant House president Kevin Ryan and former New York Times writer Tina Kelley. This well-

written book tells the story of six young people as they struggle to find a home and use the services of Covenant House to help them along the way. Covenant House is the largest charitable institution serving homeless youth. The stories were striking in their honesty and the realism of what many youth go through, a journey that most of us could not begin to comprehend.

The term "homeless," to me, can be defined in many ways: living in a car, on the street, couch surfing or even between homes. To me, it's a state wherein there is no stability. As I read the testimonies from the Youth Leaving Care hearings, it's clear that these youth were looking for something essential to any household: stability.

As I conclude, I'd like to thank a number of individuals who have worked tirelessly to make this report become a reality. First, thanks to Irwin Elman, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, for his leadership. Irwin has worked for many years advocating on behalf of children and youth across the province. The office was established in October 2007. Since its inception, Irwin has been a true champion for children and youth in the province. Speaker, while Irwin's advocacy for children goes far beyond what I've briefly mentioned, it was made apparent to me that he will be in the hearts of many youth for years to come.

I would also like to thank the Ontario Association of CASs and YouthCAN team for their support.

Speaker, I'd also like to thank my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Dr. Eric Hoskins. Not only did the minister promptly advise his ministry to act on recommendations that came up from the hearings and to keep him updated regularly, but those of us who have had the privilege to know Dr. Hoskins know of the near decade he spent as a doctor and humanitarian in war-torn regions across the world, helping hundreds of children through his charity co-founded with his wife, War Child Canada.

Finally, Speaker, most importantly, I would like to thank all the children and youth from across the province, both in and from care, who courageously came together to share their stories for this report. As the minister stated in May, when the report was tabled, "We owe these kids our sustained action, yes. But most of all, we owe them respect."

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I will close by saying that the setting aside of May 14 goes a long way. It may not seem extraordinary to those who have not walked along their path, but to them it's a beacon, a starting point to continuing to work with them to improve our system, if not for them, then for those who will come after them.

I want to thank all of my honourable colleagues in this House. I look forward to support for this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to speak to today's motion. I will support the motion brought forward. I was a former critic for children and youth. I'm happy to do it.

My only comment—and it comes back to my experience with the Select Committee on Mental Health and

Addictions: Absolutely, stigma and awareness need to be dealt with.

I've also read the report, *Youth Leaving Care*, as a result of their hearings, when it came out in the spring. I won't read the recommendations because you've ably covered that, but I would like to talk about the goals. There were eight goals that came out of the report: "We are safe, protected and respected as equal human beings. We have people in our lives who are there for us. We have stability and connections to family, roots and culture. We are part of our lives and have a say in what happens to us. We have access to the information, resources and options we need. We are supported throughout care to become successful adults. We are part of a strong and proud community of youth in and from care." And the last goal was, "That the best experiences from some children and youth and care become the standard for everyone in care."

They had some pretty moving hearings over the course of last fall and early winter. As I say, while I'm happy to support an awareness day, I think there's a lot more that we could be doing and we could be talking about. The awareness day is a small, non-controversial—let's be blunt: No financial resources will need to be attached to it. There are a lot of issues that need to be dealt with, with basically what are our collective children from youth and care. So I would have liked to have seen a little more substance, a little less PR. Enough said.

The recommendations touched on an awful lot of issues. Some of them certainly are attached with financial resources—or financial resources would need to be attached to them. This is when I get really frustrated with the wastefulness, because we can all talk about, we can all show examples of where we would love to have additional resources in our ridings, in our constituencies, in our critic areas, and I'm sure the ministers see it as well. If they only had that additional resource, what they would be able to do with some of the ideas that came out of the report.

So when I see some of the issues at Ornge, when I see some of the frustrations with the Oakville power plant and the Mississauga power plant, it is very frustrating to look at some of our most vulnerable children, our collective children, and say, "No, we can't extend your care," or "No, we can't give you additional help when you are leaving care because we don't have the money."

I will leave it at that. As I say, I'm happy to support it, but let's not stop here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member for Windsor West for bringing this motion forward.

I'm pleased to support this motion, as it is a recommendation by the Youth Leaving Care hearings team in the report, *My Real Life Book*. But that report also made it clear that much more needs to be done, other than simply declaring a day to recognize children and youth in care.

The report was a result of many months of outstanding work by a group of exceptional young people who

themselves were youth in care or former youth in care. Over those months, the team heard from youth in care in ways that made sense for them. In addition to standard written submissions, they sought and received input by audio, video, art and poetry. And as the title suggests, their findings were suggested in a creative way using a format that had a deep meaning to children and youth in care.

Let me quote from the first page of the report:

"Life books are supposed to be created and given to children and youth in care to help them know the stories of their lives and mark significant events in their lives. Some are beautiful and treasured, and some youth don't even know about them.

"One youth told us that he received a file folder. Another youth said she was told she couldn't even have hers.

"In some ways this report is our collective life book, a way for us to document the stories presented at the hearings and inspire change."

I know I have been inspired by watching the Youth Leaving Care hearings team at work. I have marvelled at their enthusiasm and their ability to get at the root of the issues and present their findings in a way that is so hard to ignore.

I also want to offer my thanks and support for the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. While the work was definitely done mostly by the youth, they started by voicing their concerns to Irwin Elman, the provincial advocate. Irwin listened, and throughout the process offered the encouragement, guidance and support of his office.

I was inspired reading the report and truly hope it does inspire change, because change is badly needed. As the parents of these children—and that is what we must consider ourselves—we have a responsibility to make that change.

If anyone has any doubt that change is needed, read the report. It outlines some startling statistics:

There are almost 17,000 children in the care of the children's aid society, and of these, almost half, 8,300, are crown wards.

Six and a half per cent of children in care under the age of 18 are already living independently, while Canadian youth on average live at home until their mid-20s.

Just 44% of youth in care graduate from high school, compared to 81% of the general population.

Forty-three per cent of homeless youth have previous child welfare involvement.

Beyond the statistics, the report relates hundreds of jarring comments and observations from children and youth in care or adults who were in care.

I want to take some time to talk about those observations and comments, what I heard at the hearings and what I've read in the report. They display the vulnerability felt by youth in care.

Steven, a 20-year-old former youth in care said, "I'm very close to my grandma. Even up until today, I still talk to my grandma. And out of how many people in my

family, I think she's the only one that actually calls and checks up on me. But in that home, I wasn't allowed to go see my mom, my sister, my dad, none of them."

Ken, now 31, said, "As a child I received many labels: bi-racial, orphan, foster child, and crown ward. These labels profoundly affected my sense of identity."

The report points to the isolation they feel. Katelynn said, "So, I very much felt alone and it would have been so nice to have somebody, I guess, there to be able to say, we kind of get this and it's okay that you're feeling this way."

As 12-year-old Jessica put it so poetically, "There's no place like a spot in someone's heart."

Children, youth in care and former youth in care reported that they are left out of their own lives.

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Ashley, aged 20, said, "As a child, being taken from home and moved from family to family, I was never able to find home again. I was looked at differently by society, had words pushed into my mouth by workers, and as a child I never seen or had a say for my best interest." Or, as Nick put it more bluntly, "I'm a group home kid; I ain't got no rights."

They feel that no one is really there for them. Catherine said, "I have, since the age of three or four, been responsible for myself and my upkeep"—since the age of three or four.

The reports talk about the unpredictability of care. One youth reported, "I moved to a group home. I was very frustrated going there. I moved into another home; moved in with others who were not deaf. It's always been very frustrating, especially because I had to move around so much, and I moved quite a bit." Another says, "We have a lot of staff that are in and out. I don't always have the same people that I'm working with."

Then, there's the end of care, that time when the system says that the individual is no longer a youth and no longer entitled to our care. Currently, extended care maintenance ends at age 21, and that point comes as a shock to many youth. Most children these days don't leave home until their mid- to late 20s, and when they do leave, most always they have the knowledge that they can turn back to their parents if they need to. Youth in care don't have that option.

As Brandon, a 20-year-old, says, "I already had my family taken away once, and it was probably the hardest thing in my life. I didn't know where else to turn or what I was going to do, and when I turn 21 it's all going to happen again."

My Real Life Book also has some heartening stories, reflections from youth who had good experiences, successes that highlight what is possible. Unfortunately, they are few and far between. Earlier I noted that the province is the parent to the children and youth in care. Certainly, we are their legal guardians. If this report tells us anything, it's that we need to do better. One way we can do it is to provide oversight of children's aid societies through the Ombudsman, an avenue through which people's concerns and complaints can be heard

and acted upon. That is why I have introduced a private member's bill to do just that. Bill 110 will come up for second reading on September 27, and I urge all members to support it.

Today, we take a step toward fulfilling one of the report's recommendations: the declaration of Children and Youth in Care Day, that day being May 14. Recognizing May 14 as Children and Youth in Care Day will help all Ontarians to recognize and appreciate children and youth in care. It will help raise awareness and reduce the stigma that often goes with that territory. It will help keep the bigger issues in the spotlight, and on May 14 each year it will remind us of the report and the various recommendations within it. It will give us a touch point and an opportunity to get an update on the progress that has been made, because progress must be made. The Youth in Care hearings team has given us some direction through their recommendations contained in the report. In fact, the declaration of Children and Youth in Care Day is just one of seven recommendations they have made. So let's talk about the others.

The number one recommendation was that the province, working with youth in and from care and other stakeholders, develop an action plan for fundamental change by November of this year. The government has reported that a working group has been established to develop strategies and an action plan, and I look forward to hearing what they have to say. In addition, the report made five other recommendations for change that could be made immediately.

First, raise the age of extended care maintenance to 25. I've already touched on the need for this measure, not the least of which is the fact that at 21, many are not ready to go it alone. Indeed, studies show that 20- to 24-year-olds now stay at home at three times the rate their counterparts did just two generations ago. But what is so important to understand is that such a move would actually save money. Members may remember the release last March of the report 25 Is the New 21. That report contained a cost-benefit analysis of changing the ECM age limit to 25. That analysis estimated that for every dollar spent, governments could save or earn an estimated \$1.36 for the working lifetime of that person. This recommendation makes social and fiscal sense, and it can be acted on.

The report recommended that we allow youth to stay in foster care and group homes until they're prepared for independence, to provide all needed supports to help children and youth in care succeed. The report recommends that the government commit to ensuring that every child in care has ongoing health and education services in order to monitor and improve experiences in care and beyond. The report recommends that the government commit to collecting and publishing information on how children and youth in care are doing.

Finally, it has recommended that an online resource for children and youth in care be created. This resource would provide information about rights, jobs, volunteer opportunities, scholarships, extracurricular activities and

advocacy opportunities, and it would be easily accessed directly by those who need it.

I stand here today in support of Bill 90 and look forward to the declaration of May 14 as Children and Youth in Care Day. I also stand in support and admiration of the work that has been done to bring us to this point, but it is clear that much more lies ahead if we are to meet the expectations, the desires and, more importantly, the needs of children and youth in care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to thank the member from Windsor West for her outspoken advocacy on behalf of children and youth in care in the province.

I want to say that like a number of others in this Legislature, prior to getting into politics, I spent my entire professional career working with and on behalf of vulnerable children. As the member from Windsor West had mentioned, much of that was in war zones in Africa and the Middle East and around the world. I have to admit, despite seeing the devastation wrought by civil war and the impact it has on children and youth, I was not myself prepared for what I heard and what I saw and the discussions that I had, both in the two days of consultations last fall, here at Queen's Park, but subsequently in the many discussions that I've had with children and youth both in care and those who have left care. These are individuals that in many cases—well, in all cases—have been through extraordinarily difficult and tragic and challenging circumstances. The results of them migrating into adulthood have been extremely varied.

At these hearings and subsequently, I met many, many extraordinary, courageous, articulate, accomplished individuals who were so well spoken in talking to me and to others in government and beyond about what needs to be done. I have to say that the work that they put into preparing this report, My Real Life Book, was without precedent, courageous and truly inspirational to many of us.

This work that they've done, this impressive and inspiring account of what we heard at those hearings—the members opposite are correct; it's now time for us to implement their recommendations. I was proud that actually the first top-priority recommendation was to strike a working group in my ministry to look at transforming how we approach this complicated but tremendously important issue. Within the 60 days that the report asked for it, that working group was named and up and running. I'm proud to say as well that the majority of individuals on that working group are in fact youth themselves—children and youth who are either in care or who have subsequently left care.

I know others in the Liberal caucus want to speak to this important bill, which I commend the member for introducing.

Some, including cynics, might think that the relevance of introducing a bill that calls for and declares a Children and Youth in Care Day is perhaps not all that important. All I have to do is suggest that you talk to children and

youth in and out of care to understand from them, to hear from them, just how important this is. Because this bill—this modest declaration and creation of a day—speaks to them and says, "We see you. We hear you. We acknowledge you. We respect you. What you say is important. We commend you for your courage and we want to work with you to create a better system" that will help them and those that come after them.

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This is about recognizing the amazing contributions of youth and young people in the care of our province. It's about saying to them, in no uncertain terms, "You are valued." I'm proud to be supporting this bill today, and I encourage all my colleagues on both sides of the House to join with me and others in recognizing current and former youth in care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's my pleasure today to speak in full support of a bill which reaffirms this province's ongoing, staunch commitment to the youth of Ontario, and especially those who face extraordinary life challenges. Bill 90, the Children and Youth in Care Day Act, will celebrate the achievements, reduce the stigma, and recognize children and youth in care by proclaiming May 14 of each year Children and Youth in Care Day.

Children's aid affects many families' lives in Ontario. There are over 8,300 crown wards and another 17,000 kids in care. In my riding alone, in Barrie, the agency serves approximately 10,000 families per year. I was proud just this past fall to have hosted and chaired the CAS Foundation fundraiser to raise money for post-secondary education for children in care. We raised \$70,000 at that one event.

Last November, youth in care organized hearings, as we've heard, at Queen's Park to discuss the challenges of being in care, like the isolation, invisibility, anonymity they feel throughout this experience. As Ontario's policy-makers, we have a duty to ensure all youth feel that they matter and that they have every opportunity to reach their full potential.

We still have a long way to go, as many have noted today, to fulfill this commitment. Studies show, and young people tell us, that when crown wards transition out of care, they don't do as well as other adults. They're less likely to finish high school, pursue post-secondary education or even earn a living wage. They're more likely than their peers to spiral into homelessness, poverty, mental health issues and challenges with the justice system. This is unacceptable, and we must work to change this any way we can.

It's time we addressed these changes head-on. Bill 90 is one important step in creating a dialogue with youth and fostering awareness that can change the lives of some of the most vulnerable Ontarians that we represent. Creating a day to recognize these youth affirms our commitment to them, recognizes the additional struggles they go through to achieve things we sometimes take for granted, and celebrates their achievements.

Youth are the future of Ontario. Their well-being should be the utmost priority for all of us in here and to this government. We must ensure that every youth has the advantage to succeed in life and every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Irwin Elman and the former youth in care had great hearings and had a great report that was very touching.

Mr. Speaker, many people in here know I have a very personal experience with how well these kids can do when the right opportunities are placed in front of them, whether it's by chance or whether it's by design. Right now, we have an opportunity to not let chance take over and to actually do it by design. Let's seize that opportunity. This is a great starting point and a great bill, but we have a lot further to go to make sure these kids get an equal opportunity to excel and be productive members of our community. They can do it. They need our help to do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: This is one of the moments in my political career where I am just so happy and honoured to speak to such an important bill that my colleague has brought forward and that I believe that everybody is going to support. Many have spoken already about the youth-in-care hearings.

I want to talk a bit about the YouthCAN conference I was at recently, where there were many of the authors from the Youth Leaving Care hearings; they were the authors of the *My Real Life Book* report. Not only was the YouthCAN conference a great conference, but I was just so impressed with the youth-in-care folks who were involved in organizing the conference, and the passion, the conviction they brought to that, the determination. There were many great workshops they organized—career workshops, talent shows—and of course, they had some fun.

But the thing that really touched me was that when I talked to one of the people at the conference, one of the youth-in-care authors involved in the Youth Leaving Care hearings, she told me that she would like to think about becoming a politician. She would like to be involved in public service. I was just so touched and so moved. It reminded me that when it comes to important matters like vulnerable youth, like children in care, this is where we all need to work together—and I believe we are going to continue to work together—to do what we can for our children in care. By proclaiming May 14 every year as Children and Youth in Care Day, the province of Ontario and everybody here at the Legislature will recognize the important contributions that the current and former crown and society wards make.

Again, it's a complete pleasure to speak to this. I am mindful of the young woman who spoke to me about wanting to become a politician. She's looking to us to work together in a non-partisan way on things that are very important to children and youth in Ontario.

Congratulations to my colleague for bringing the bill forward. I want to congratulate the opposition members who are supporting this as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you to the member from Windsor West for bringing this legislation forward in the spirit of and in tribute to the Youth Leaving Care hearings that took place here at Queen's Park in November.

As opposition critic for children and youth services, I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the youth in care whose voices, vision and energy are contained in the report from those hearings and who have enriched this conversation over much of the last year. That process is ongoing and has yet to reach a conclusion, but it is a valuable conversation and an important one, and I'm encouraged that we find ourselves continuing the dialogue today to move forward.

As I remarked earlier this year when the report was first delivered, these young people are inspiring and possess uncommon strength and ambition. I am honoured to rise in this Legislature today to speak to Bill 90, the Children and Youth in Care Day Act, which names May 14 of each year in recognition of the experience and contributions of Ontario's roughly 8,300 children and youth in care.

The report that inspired this legislation was drawn from first-hand front-line experience, and it doesn't always paint a comforting portrait of the state of children and youth care in Ontario today. Immediately apparent are the barriers in a system that can be impersonal and at some times dehumanizing. These young people move around so often they're unable to undergo the emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual growth that most young Ontarians take for granted.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of all Ontario's children and youth, but especially those who face extraordinary challenges. When crown wards transition out of care, they don't do as well as other young adults. They're less likely to finish high school, pursue post-secondary education or even earn a living wage. They're most likely to spiral into poverty, homelessness, mental health issues and situations in the justice system.

During November's Youth Leaving Care hearings, we heard youth tell the province's policy-makers that they felt invisible, isolated and anonymous. This day offers us all a chance to address those failings and have conversations that can change the lives of some of the most vulnerable Ontarians. I am pleased to support Bill 90.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I also am very pleased to rise in the House and support Bill 90, brought by our colleague from Windsor West.

I'm going to focus a little bit on the mental health issues related to children and youth in care. Much as my colleague from Dufferin–Caledon and I learned through our deliberations in the select committee, when we hear individuals such as these children in their report, *My Real Life Book*, saying that they are vulnerable, they are

isolated, there's really no one there for them, we know that this type of plea for help will clearly lead to mental health issues.

1600

Children's Mental Health Ontario tells us that there are many factors that contribute to mental health disorders, and negative early life experiences such as abuse, neglect, death of a relative, other losses and trauma can severely affect an individual. So it's no surprise—in fact, I have some statistics from the Ministry of Children and Youth—that they are disproportionately affected by mental health issues. Based on a review of some 5,194 crown ward files in 2010, approximately 53% of the crown wards were identified as having some type of mental health diagnosis, and these include some 27% who actually had an attention deficit disorder/attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, but other syndromes did include fetal alcohol syndrome, psychiatric disorders, eating disorders, dual diagnosis, depression and anxiety.

So even though this is a recommendation that we acknowledge May 14 as Children and Youth in Care Day, it is the first step to what I understand from the ministry is a very comprehensive look at child welfare in this province in a comprehensive way, and I think we all look forward to the recommendations that will come forward in the next few months from the group that the minister has appointed to look at this issue.

I commend the member for bringing this forward, and of course we'll be supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: The first thing I want to do, as a parent and grandparent, is to commend the member from Windsor West for bringing this item forward. We should all know that the children's aid society that we work with in our communities—there are 8,000 children who are crown wards with children's aid in Ontario today, and the studies that we have been briefed on here today have shown that crown wards transition out of care but many of them are at high risk, as has been said. Few of them finish high school and pursue secondary education and even earn a living wage. They are more likely to spiral into poverty, homelessness, mental health and issues challenging and entangled in the justice system.

I think what we're doing here in supporting you in this legislation is recognizing that we need to celebrate them and that youth deserve a second chance. Often they didn't inflict these conditions on themselves; it's through conditions that may have been beyond their control.

I commend you for having compassion for those young children who need to be encouraged and supported, and indeed celebrated. We will all look forward to celebrating. I believe May 14 is the day that you've put forward, and indeed that's the appropriate month. I believe that's the month we celebrate Mother's Day and Parent Day. It's now going to be a time when we celebrate children and children at risk in our society today.

I just want to leave one more thing on the table. I am very privileged to have nine grandchildren, and my

grandchildren are as important to me—I think that all children need a caring adult, and that's the statement here, that in this Legislature we are caring adults and we're going to support this bill, Bill 90, celebrating children in care. I thank those who have made this an important issue and have worked to educate us on the conditions that surround these children in care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Coteau: It's my pleasure today to speak in support of Bill 90. This bill really supports my personal belief that when we're making decisions on behalf of young people in this province, it's imperative that we have their voices contribute to that process.

I'm proud to speak on behalf of this bill, the Children and Youth in Care Day Act, because it supports over 8,000 young people who live in the care of crown or children's aid societies across this great province. This bill recognizes the contributions that young people have made to this province. It also recognizes the resilience that current and former youth in care show in everyday life.

I'm proud of the panel that came from right across this great province of Ontario and those who showed the courage to convey to the committee their experiences with respect to the challenges of living under the care of the province.

I want to commend the work of my esteemed colleague from Windsor West, who has put a great deal of thought and work into this bill, which will significantly raise awareness for children and youth in care.

Growing up, I personally knew a few young individuals who were crown wards, and I know about the difficulty they faced in life. They didn't have the same support that I had at home. I grew up, and I noticed the challenges they faced on a daily basis.

I wish that all Ontarians would have an opportunity to read My Real Life Book, the report from the leaving care hearings. I encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, if they haven't done so, to pick up the publication and give it a read. The report contains extremely powerful and profoundly moving insights into people who made submissions to the Youth Leaving Care hearings, and it illustrates how important it is that we include young people and their conversations about how we can improve this government and the programs and services we offer.

As a parent, reading through that report, I took a few moments last night to really reflect and to think about how it would be if my children were placed in that type of situation. It was quite tough for me.

As a former school board trustee, as a former youth worker in Malvern—a community you know quite well, Mr. Speaker—and as an MPP, I've worked with young people often. To have them included in the process to make better decisions, to drive the policy we make as a government and to be agents of change is an important thing. I'm really proud of this initiative. It's the exact same model we used for the anti-youth-violence action committee. We're going to bring young people in to form

a committee, to advise the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I'm proud of the steps that we're taking as a government to really engage young people and bring them in the process so we can move forward as a government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Windsor West, you have two minutes for a response.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you to all my colleagues in this House for the support that we're receiving for Bill 90, for this declaration of Child and Youth in Care Day for May 14. I'd like to thank—hopefully I got all of them down here—the members for Dufferin–Caledon and Hamilton Mountain, Minister Hoskins, and the members from Barrie, from Pickering–Scarborough East, Burlington, Oak Ridges–Markham, Durham and Don Valley East. Thank you to all of you for coming forward and supporting this bill.

Some of the comments that were made that I'd like to reflect on that I agree with: That is, every child deserves to feel safe and protected. I agree everyone should read this report, if you haven't already. You really get the feel for this if you read this.

Minister Hoskins, thank you for your support and action on this file and your dedication to the children and youth of Ontario.

There are good stories, as we've heard, but unfortunately they're not all good stories. It's up to us to make them all good stories. We have to get rid of all the labels and recognize all children and youth for their potential. It's not “those kids over there” and labelling them, but they're individuals, each with unique abilities and skills. As the member from Durham stated in his comments, we need to celebrate all children and youth, we need to encourage all children and youth, and we need to ensure that all youth are given all the supports that they require to succeed.

This bill, to summarize, recognizes the enormous contributions that children and youth in care make to the province, as well as the strength, bravery and resilience shown by these children and youth in the face of adversity.

Thank you to everyone who spoke to this bill. Thank you, everyone, for your support, and I, too, look forward to May 14, when we can first celebrate our Child and Youth in Care Day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT BILLS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE DES PROJETS DE LOI ÉMANANT DU GOUVERNEMENT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 55, standing in the name of Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris has moved second reading of Bill 109. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to committee. Mr. Harris?

Mr. Michael Harris: Finance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Harris requests that the bill be referred to the finance committee. Agreed? Agreed.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. McDonell has moved private members' notice of motion number 26. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard noes.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

I believe the ayes have it.

We'll deal with the vote at the end of regular business.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES PRIS EN CHARGE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. Piruzza has moved second reading of Bill 90. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), Mrs. Piruzza.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: To the Standing Committee on Social Policy, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1611 to 1616.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would members please take their seats.

Mr. McDonell has moved private members' notice of motion number 26.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Amott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hudak, Tim

Jackson, Rod
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Leone, Rob
MacLeod, Lisa
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Campbell, Sarah
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Coteau, Michael
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe

DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Hoskins, Eric
Jaczek, Helena
Kwinter, Monte
MacCharles, Tracy
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Marchese, Rosario
McNeely, Phil
Miller, Paul

Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Piruzza, Teresa
Qadri, Shafiq
Schein, Jonah
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Takharr, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Wong, Soo

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 30; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

Hon. Laurel C. Brotten: No further business for today. I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Education has moved adjournment of this House. Agreed? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, 10:30 a.m.—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): — Wednesday at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1620.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
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Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Supérieur-Nord	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
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Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
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Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest-Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket-Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
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MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma-Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity-Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough- Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	

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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
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Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
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